In the Shade of the Qur'ān

The Martyr
(Inshā' Allāh)

Sayyid Quṭb

Vol III

Sūrah 4

Contents

Transliteration Table

Consonants. Arabic

Initial: unexpressed medial and final:

ء	ʼ	د	d	ض	đ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ţ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ż	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	`	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	هـ	h
ح	ĥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ş	ق	q	ي	y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc

Short:	ـِ	i	ـَ	a	ـُ	u
Long:	ـِي	ī	ـَا	ā	ـُو	ū
Diphthongs:			ـَيْ	ay	ـَوْ	aw

SŪRAH 4

Al-Nisā'

(Women)

Prologue

This, the second longest *sūrah* in the Qur'ān was revealed in Madinah, following shortly after *Sūrah* 60, The Examined Woman, or *Al-Mumtaĥanah.* Some reports say that this latter *sūrah* was partly revealed at the time of the expedition that ended in Makkah's fall to Islam in year 8 of the Islamic calendar, while the other parts were revealed earlier, in year 6, at the time of the expedition ending in the peace treaty of Al-Ĥudaybiyyah.

As stated in Volume I, when we discussed the opening of *Sūrah* 2, The Cow, the chronological order of revelation of the Qur'ānic *sūrahs* cannot be totally ascertained. The longer *sūrahs* were not revealed in *toto,* on the same occasion. Rather, several *sūrahs* continued to be revealed concurrently over the same period of time. When a verse or a passage was revealed, the Prophet was ordered to place it at its position in a particular *sūrah.* This means that the same *sūrah* remained unfinished for a period of time, sometimes only briefly but on other occasions this gap could extend over several years. For example, some of the verses of *Sūrah* 2, the longest in the Qur'ān, were among the first to be revealed in Madinah whilst others were among the last parts of the Qur'ān to be so delivered.

The same applies to this *sūrah.* Certain parts were revealed after *Sūrah* 60 in years 6 and 8, but many of its verses were revealed early in the Madinah period. It is felt that the revelation of this *sūrah* covered a period starting after the Battle of Uĥud in year 3, stretching over to year 8 when the early part of *Sūrah* 60 was revealed.

We mention by way of example the verse in this *sūrah* which includes a ruling

concerning women found guilty of fornication: "*As for those of your women who are guilty of gross immoral conduct, call upon four from among you to bear witness against them. If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them or God opens another way for them.*" (Verse 15) It is certain that this verse was revealed earlier than the one in *Sūrah* 24, entitled Light, or *al-Nūr,* which gives a definitive ruling on the punishment for fornication: "*As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion with them keep you from [carrying out] this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a group of the believers witness their punishment.*" (24: 2) This verse was revealed after the incident known as "The False Story" in year 5. When it was revealed the Prophet said: "Take this from me. God has opened a way for them..." The way to which he refers is the one prescribed in this latter verse. This *sūrah* includes several examples which give some indication of the chronology of their revelation, as we explained in the opening remarks of our commentary on *Sūrah* 2 (Volume I, p. 9).

The *sūrah* also reflects some of the efforts Islam exerted in bringing into being and protecting the first Muslim community and Islamic society. We see an example of the influence of the Qur'ān on that newly born society which derived its basic and distinctive characteristics from the Qur'ān and the Islamic code of living. Here we have clear evidence of how Islam deals with man and how human nature reacts to it. We see how Islam takes man by the hand from the lowest of depths, guiding his footsteps up to a higher horizon, steering him along so that he is able to resist temptation, desire, fear and worry, helping him to bear the difficulties he may encounter and to resist whatever his enemies might scheme against him.

Just as in the earlier two Volumes, which discussed *Sūrahs* 2 and 3 respectively, the Qur'ān here faces all the circumstances prevailing at the time of the birth of the Muslim community in Madinah. It outlines the code of living which lays down the foundation of the Muslim community. It explains the basic principles of the Islamic faith, the values and standards it lays down, and the duties that need to be fulfilled in order to discharge this trust. At the same time, it describes the nature of the forces hostile to the Divine constitution and the community implementing it, warning the Muslim community against these enemies and their schemes. It also exposes the falsehood of their beliefs and their wicked devices.

However, every *sūrah* of the Qur'ān contains its own unique characteristics and distinctive features, as well as a specific idea which permeates all the themes it discusses. This uniqueness essentially means that the themes of every *sūrah* should gather together coherently around its central topic in a special system designed to enhance its distinctive features, just like those of a unique living being which remains the only one of its kind.

We almost feel that this *sūrah* is alive, that its well defined objective is pursued

diligently and, thereby, successfully attained. It achieves this by words, verses and passages. We almost have the same sympathy with this *sūrah* as we would have towards a unique living being moving towards his or her clear objectives, making his or her own moves and experiencing the full gamut of feelings and emotions.

The *sūrah* moves with clear determination to erase all aspects of that ignorant society from which Islam saved the Muslim community. Removing whatever vestiges of that society remained, fashioning the distinctive features of Islamic society and bringing its unique personality into sharp relief. It urges the Muslim community to defend its unique character, outlining its foundation and illustrating the dangers to which it is exposed and from what quarters. It lays down legislation to regulate all this from within its clearly defined line of action.

At the same time, we see the lingering aspects of that ignorant society struggling against the new system, values and standards, trying to overshadow the bright features of the new Islamic society. We actually witness the battle fought by the Qur'ān here, which is by no means less fierce or intransigent than any other physical battle against hostile forces.

When we look carefully at the residue the Muslim society carried over from the old ignorant society, we are surprised at how deeply rooted it was; so much so that its eradication continued over the years taken to reveal this *sūrah.* Indeed this *sūrah* deals with certain aspects of that residue, while several other *sūrahs* deal with other aspects. What is surprising is that such traces of past ignorance continued to be firmly rooted until such a late stage in the life of the Muslim community in Madinah. We are amazed, however, at the great divide that Islam managed to bring about between the two societies. It picked up this community of new believers from the depths of paganism and moved it upwards to a height that humanity could never achieve in its long history except when so steered by the unique code of life Islam puts in place. What is more, this was all done gently, patiently and with a steady and firm step.

Whoever looks carefully at this phenomenon in the history of mankind is bound to recognise some aspects of God's wisdom in choosing the unlettered people of Arabia to be entrusted with such a profound message. They actually represented the very depths of ignorance; ideologically, intellectually, morally, socially, economically and politically. That made them the best model against which to demonstrate the effects of the Islamic system and code of living. They, then, provided the portrait depicting how the great miracle, which no other system can work out, is accomplished. The line of its action is thus seen in practice, as it leads the community, stage by stage, from the lowest depths to the highest zenith. Thus humanity, across all subsequent ages, has been able to see the full workings of the system and how it can help any community, regardless of its position, elevate itself to the same heights those

unlettered Arabs were able to achieve.

The Islamic constitution has well-established principles and constituent elements, because it deals with man, who has a constant, unchangeable make-up. Nothing of the changes and developments that human life may experience will change human nature and make-up. Nothing will make man a different species. These are merely superficial changes, like waves in the sea: they do not change the nature of its water, or even its undercurrents that are subject to certain constant and natural factors.

Thus, all these unchanging Qur'ānic statements deal with an unchanging human nature. Since both are devised by the same Maker, they are able to deal with the changing circumstances of human life and its developing stages with a flexibility that still enables man to retain his essential elements. Man has deliberately been endowed with all the necessary skills to deal with the constant flux that different life situations bring about. Hence the Divine constitution for human life has been given the same degree of flexibility, because it has been made suitable for human life to the end of time.

Thus the Islamic system, represented by the Qur'ānic and *ĥadīth* texts, is able to take human individuals and human communities by the hand, from whatever level they may be at, leading them upwards towards the highest zenith. It never forces them backwards, nor does it allow them to descend by even one step. Nor does it ever tire of any community or feel itself unable to take it up the ascending path to the highest level. The primitive, backward community of the Arabs during their days of ignorance was no different to the civilised, industrial societies pertaining in Europe and America in these present days of unenlightenment: both find in the Divine constitution and in the Qur'ān their rightful places. Both will he taken by the hand, from their respective positions, along the rising path until they reach the top. It was Islam that took Arabian society to that very pinnacle in those earlier days of human history and it is Islam that can achieve the same today, as also across the myriad of societies that make up our global system.

When we speak of an ignorant society, we are not referring to conditions that might have prevailed during a particular period of history. Ignorant is every society in which human beings are subjugated by others. This is the case under all existing systems on earth today. In all these contemporary societies, people look to other human beings for the formulation of their concepts, principles, values, standards, legislation and traditions. This, then, is the essence of an ignorant society, where human beings submit themselves to their fellow human beings.

Islam is the only system of living where people are free from subjugation by other people, because they receive all their concepts, principles, values, standards, legislation and traditions from God. Thus, it is only to God that they bow, only God's

law that they obey, and to God alone that they submit. In this way they are free of all subjugation, because, unlike all other people, they surrender themselves only to God. This is the parting of ways between Islam and ignorance, in all its shapes and forms. Such delineation is clearly and precisely demonstrated in this *sūrah.*

It is well known that every order, prohibition or directive in the Qur'ān was issued in response to a practical situation pertaining in the ignorant society at the time and which aimed either to originate something new or to abolish something in existence, without prejudice to the overall rule that makes "general application supersede special circumstances". It should be remembered that Qur'ānic texts are meant to be implemented throughout all generations and all communities. Here we see the miracle of the Islamic approach. These texts, which dealt with particular situations, are so designed to assist any human society, no matter what its stage of development may be, to rise up along the path to the pinnacle reached by the first Muslim community. Thus when we read the Qur'ān, we can discern in its orders, prohibitions and directives the features and aspects of ignorant society, and we can also see the new features and aspects Islam wants to initiate and establish in the new community it is building.

So what do we find in this *sūrah* of the features of that ignorant society which remained extant in the first Muslim community after it was picked tip by Islam? What new features do we see Islam trying to establish in this new society?

We see addressed the rights of orphans, particularly girls, plundered by the very relatives and guardians who were supposed to look after them; what property of theirs was good and valuable being substituted with foul and less valuable things. The good of their inheritance being quickly consumed lest these orphans come of age and demand what was rightfully theirs. Young and rich orphaned girls were detained at home until they could be married to their guardians, not because the latter loved them, but rather because they wanted their money. Alternatively, they might be forced to marry their guardians' sons so as to achieve the same end.

We see a society in which the young and vulnerable, as also women, were wronged and not given their rightful share of any inheritance. Strong-bodied men who were able to fight in war got away with the largest share of any inheritance, whilst the weak and vulnerable were left with only a meagre portion. Yet it was for such miserly shares that young orphan girls and widowed women were detained so that they would be married to either the guardians themselves or to whom the latter so chose. The reason for that was simply to ensure that their property would not fall into the hands of strangers.

Society at that time gave women an ignoble position, ill-treating them throughout their lives. In addition to the practices to which we have referred in cases of

inheritance, women themselves were treated as part of the estate. When a husband died, his nearest of kin would throw his robe over the widow, this as a mark of retaining her for himself. Furthermore, he could marry her without paying her any dowry, or he could give her in marriage to someone else, but in this latter case he would receive her dowry for himself. In other instances, if a man no longer wanted his wife then he seemed at liberty to ill-treat her. He could leave her in suspense, neither married nor divorced, until she bought her freedom from him with her own money.

In such a society the foundations of the family were shaken because of the low status attributed to women. Additionally, confusion was created by the rules governing adoption and alliance, for these often conflicted with ties of kinship. Furthermore, chaos marked much of the relations between the two sexes as also family relations. All this was the result of the various illegitimate relationships common in society at that time.

Furthermore, usurious financial transactions led to the plundering of property, the usurpation of rights and the violation of trust. Attacks on property and people were widespread, justice was limited to the strong, charitable donations were given only for the sake of reputation and personal pride, with only a small proportion of such donations given to the poor and needy.

These represent only some of the features pertaining in that ignorant society which this *sūrah* deals with. Other features are depicted in other *sūrahs,* as well as in the history books of both Arabia and its neighbouring nations.[1]

It was not, however, a society without some redeeming virtues. Indeed, it had virtues which made it both suitable and ready to receive the ultimate Divine message. But these were virtues that Islam saved and directed in a constructive way. Had it not been for Islam, these virtues would have remained overshadowed by greater vices, lost and working individually to little effect. The Arab nation could never have contributed anything of value to human progress except for the Islamic way of life which erased the ugly features of ignorance and replaced them with the brightness of Islam. It saved and used to good purpose those good qualities the Arabs possessed, which, as in other contemporary societies, were lost and highly unproductive. All such virtues were destined to disappear because they were not saved by any Divine message.

In this *sūrah* we also see some of the features which Islam aims to consolidate in the practical life of the Muslim community, after purging it of its traces of ignorance and after establishing a proper order so as to ensure their protection. We see first of all a statement of the true nature of Lordship and the fact that God is the only Lord in

[1] A fuller discussion has been given in our commentary on verse 164 of *Sūrah* 3, Vol. II pp. 225-30.

the universe; this being a reaffirmation of the single origin of all mankind. This makes the family the basis of all human society and ensures that the maintenance of family relationships has a strong effect on human conscience. The family is thus the mainstay of the Islamic society's structure. The weak and vulnerable in that society are protected through the concept of mutual care within the family, and society itself is protected from indecent conduct, oppression and strife. The family, Islamic society and indeed human society as a whole are all organised on the basis of the Oneness of the Lord and the unity of humanity. (See verse 1.) We will consider this important fact in full when we comment on this first verse in the *sūrah.*

We also find practical legislation which builds firmly upon the system of mutual care within society on the basis of the family. With regard to the protection of orphans, the *sūrah* couples inspiring directives with strong warnings and definitive legal provisions. (See verses 2, 6, 9 and 10.) The protection of young orphan girls and oppressed widows, ensuring their rights of inheritance and earnings, and their right of self-determination, as well as saving them from the oppression and unfair traditions of ignorant society are dealt with in many verses of the *sūrah.* (See, for example, verses 3, 4, 7, 19-21 and 127.)

The establishment of the family on a firm basis coupled with the requirements of human nature, its protection against temporary influences in family and social life are discussed in verses 22-4, 34-5 and 128-30.

Inheritance within the family based on familial organisation and mutual care between family relatives, organising relations between parties to bonds of alliance, as well as the abrogation of adoption are all legislated for in several verses. (See, for example, verses 7, 11-12, 176 and also 33.)

Legislation is also provided to protect society from immorality and to facilitate marriage and the preservation of chastity. (See, for example, verses 15-16 and 25-6.)

Organising relations between individuals in the Muslim community so that they are based on mutual care, compassion, honest counsel, justice and benevolence is the subject dealt with by many verses. (See verses 5, 8, 29-30, 32, 36-8, 59, 85-6, 92-3, 135 and 148-9.)

Another similarly important objective with equally far-reaching effects on the life of Islamic society is the definition of faith. This whereby the conditions and boundaries of Islam are delineated, and which, in turn, relates to all laws and regulations that govern the life of the individual and society with such definitions of faith and religion.

Religion is the system God has laid down for human life and the system to govern its activities. It is God who has the sole right to lay down that system. To believe in religion is to obey the leadership which God has specified as having the right to such

obedience and to give guidance. Just as it has its own faith and outlook, Islamic society also has its own leadership represented by God's Messenger (peace be upon him) and what he has conveyed to us of God's message outlining Divine law. That message remains in force even after the Prophet passed away. Submission by society to this leadership is what makes that society Islamic. Without such submission, that society is not Muslim. Submission means referring disputes to God and His Messenger for arbitration, leaving all matters to God and accepting whatever rulings the Prophet makes without hesitation.

The *sūrah* clarifies this concept and principle in such a decisive way that no room is left for argument, loophole or confusion. This comes out in numerous verses, some of which are of a general nature, like verses 1, 27 and 48, while others are more specific. Examples of the latter include verses 59-61, 64, 65, 80 and 115. From all these verses we see that Islam is not mere feelings, conceptions, slogans or worship rituals. It is also a complete system of government, a leadership to obey, and a regime following a definite code.

The *sūrah* indeed contains numerous directives based on this essential principle:

1. As with rituals of worship, all social regulations are based on the basic principle defining religion and faith. They are not merely regulations for society, they are, in effect, part of believing in the oneness of God, acknowledging Him as the only God and Lord of the universe, and a readiness to receive orders and directives from the leadership He has assigned. Thus, we see that all the legislation to which we have referred have their foundation in this concept, which is re-emphasised in the comments at the end of each relevant verse. The opening verse, for example, affirms the single origin of all mankind, calling on people to nurture their ties with their kin. It serves as an introduction for all the regulations which follow in the *sūrah.* It starts with calling on people to fear their Lord who created them all from a single soul, and concludes with further emphasis on fearing God who is ever watchful. Similarly, the verses which stress the duty of taking proper care of orphans conclude with a reminder that God will hold people to account. Dividing any inheritance according to the defined shares is shown to be something that God Himself enjoins. Fearing God is an ever- present element in all legislation regulating the family and its affairs. Thus all legislation is derived from God and all matters should be referred to Him alone.
2. Another result of that essential principle is that the loyalty of the believers remains, in totality, to their own leadership and to their faithful community. They do not enter into a patronage relationship with anyone who does not

believe in their faith, follow their system, or who does not show loyalty to their leadership. It does not matter what sort of ties they may have with that particular person: to befriend such a person is bound to lead to hypocrisy or idolatry, which, in itself, means abandoning the Muslim community as a whole. (See verses 115-16, 139 and 144-6.)

3. It is imperative, as a result, that Muslims should abandon any land where Islam is not the ruling system and where Islamic leadership does not rule. This so that they may join the Muslim community where it is established and holds sway in the world. This so that they will be able to live under Islamic leadership and not under the banner of disbelief. If they do not do so, they may be guilty of hypocrisy or disbelief, which means abandoning the Muslim camp. (See verses 88-9 and 97-100.)

4. Muslims should fight to save their oppressed Muslim brethren who cannot emigrate from the land of war. In this way, the latter will be able to join the Muslim community in its land and will not be subject to persecution that aims to turn them away from their faith. They will not have to suffer life under a system other than Islam, and will he able, instead, to enjoy life in a pure Islamic society. This is the right of every Muslim. To deny it is to deprive people of the best of God's favours in this world. (See verse 75.)

The *sūrah* follows this with a campaign encouraging Muslims to undertake a struggle for God's cause, i.e. *jihād,* laying down, if necessary, their wealth and lives. It denounces those who sit idle or try to dissuade others from joining such a struggle. This occupies much of the *sūrah* which itself is characterised by a faster rhythm. A full discussion of this campaign will be dealt with later but what we can say now is that glimpses of this campaign may be seen in verses 71-6, 84, 95-6 and 105.

Within this campaign to encourage people to struggle for God's cause come rules to regulate international relations between the land of Islam and other nations and groups. We see for example comments and directives on how to deal with those hypocrites who visited Madinah for trade and other purposes, maintaining links with its people, but who, when they left, turned their allegiance to the enemy camp. (See verses 89-91 and 94.)

Within the context of *jihād* certain rules are outlined on how to offer prayers in a state of fear and insecurity. We note how the believers are repeatedly urged to take care and make precautions against any surprise attack. This is outlined in verses 101-3. These verses show the important position of prayer in Islamic life. Within this context elaborate details are given on how to offer prayer when the enemy is close by and war is imminent. We see clearly the integrity of the Islamic system which deals with human life in all its manifestations, looking after the individual and the

community at all times.

Associated with the orders concerning jihād is a strong denunciation of the hypocrites and their alliance with the Jews of Madinah who schemed in every possible way against Islam and the Muslim community. The hypocrites are also denounced for the tricks and ploys they resorted to in the hope of diluting Islamic values. This is very clear in the verses dealing with *jihād* to which we have already referred. In addition reference in this connection may be made to verses 81-3 and 137-45.

In this and other sections of the *sūrah* we encounter references to the war against Islam and the Muslim community and leadership, launched by the followers of earlier religions, particularly the Jews, and their hypocrite allies in Madinah and the pagan Arabs of Makkah and surrounding areas. This is the same war which was discussed in the previous two *sūrahs,* The Cow and The House of `Imrān, as contained in Volumes I and II of this work. Here again we see how the Islamic system leads the Muslim community showing it how to deal with hostile forces, exposing the nature of its enemies, warning it against their schemes and the nature of the fight it is engaged in.

One aspect of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is that these very verses which were revealed to deal with a particular battle continue to describe the ever-renewing battle waged everywhere and across all generations against Islam and the Muslim community. The enemies are the same, pursuing the same objectives despite changing shapes and appearances, immediate causes and methods. Those enemies continue to pursue their aims to weaken the faith of the Muslim community, by sowing discord within its ranks and raising doubts with regard to the integrity of the Muslim leadership. They hope ultimately that they will be able to gain control of the Muslim community, its land, resources, and property, just like the Jews of Madinah exploited the two Arab tribes which lived there, the Aws and the Khazraj, before they embraced Islam and benefited by the unity and strength which Islam gave them.

The *sūrah* examines, in detail, the discussion started in the previous two *sūrahs* about the successive plots hatched by the Jews against the Muslim community in Madinah. In all these, they collaborated with the hypocrites living in Madinah itself as also the idolaters in Makkah. (See verses 44-55, 150-1 and 153-61.) The Qur'ān exposes, denounces and refutes the Jews' wicked plots. We note that the Jews are described here as non-believers and enemies, giving us an idea of just how hard such plots were for the Muslim community to endure. It was necessary that God in His glory took it upon Himself to refute the allegations of the Jews, expose their wicked motives, aims and objectives. It should be noted that the Israelites, in their long history, never accepted Divine guidance except for short bursts, but were soon wont

to wickedly murder their prophets. In their grudge and envy against the Prophet Muĥammad for being chosen to carry God's final message to mankind, and against the Muslim community for being united under God's guidance, the Jews have continued their hostility towards Islam ever since it arrived in Madinah. Every Muslim community and every Islamic revival has had to cope with their hostility.

The first aim of the Jews in Madinah was to raise doubts as to the truth of the message and prophethood of Muĥammad (peace be upon him). They realised that once this was done, it would be much easier to divert the Muslims away from their faith and their faithful leadership. This would inevitably lead to the fragmentation of the community. They knew that when the Muslims are united by their faith, under their own leadership, they are very hard to overcome. Hence the Jews always try first to weaken their unity and sow discord between them; this being certain to lead their leadership to become motivated only by personal desires and prejudices. That would ensure their loss of strength.

Hence, the *sūrah* explains the simple truth of Muĥammad's message, which was by no means a unique or strange development. The Israelites themselves knew much about Divine messages to mankind. Muĥammad's message was merely one in a chain of messages through which God puts the argument for faith in Him clearly in front of human beings, before He holds them accountable. God bestowed His revelations on Muĥammad just like He did with earlier messengers. He granted Muĥammad prophethood and wisdom in the same way as He granted these to the Israelite prophets. There is nothing to wonder about, then, in God choosing one of His servants to be the bearer of His last message and to give him the leadership over mankind. All excuses advanced by the Jews are false. Indeed they resorted to the same wicked devices with their greatest messenger, Moses (peace be upon him), and with other prophets, but particularly so with Jesus (peace be upon him). Hence, Muslims must pay no attention to what they claim. Many verses in the *sūrah* explain this, but particular reference may be made to verses 163-6, 153-7 and 54-5.

The *sūrah* also explains some of the most essential elements in the basic concepts of the Islamic faith, purging it of all ambiguity. Refuting all the false allegations the Jews circulated against Jesus (peace be upon him) and his pure, virgin mother, the *sūrah* also outlines the excesses introduced into Christian beliefs. It re-asserts the concepts of the oneness of God and man's servitude to God. It also clarifies the concept of fate and the relationship between God and His servants, the nature of life, its duration, death and its relation to fate, what sins God may forgive, the truth of repentance and the rules governing action and reward. (See verses 17-18, 26-8, 31, 40, 77-9, 123-4, 147, 150-2 and 171-3.)

The *sūrah* also includes a number of the moral principles basic to Islamic society, some of which have already been mentioned. It must be said here that the moral

aspect is not only profound and central to the Islamic concept of human life but also to the type of society Islam builds. Hardly any aspect of life is found without an integral element of morality. We will only refer to some basic points of this highly important aspect in the life of the Muslim community.

Since Islamic society is based on the guiding principle of ascribing Divinity to God alone, it is free of any form of submission to His creatures. Indeed, it is the only society on earth where all attributes of Godhead are ascribed firmly and absolutely to God alone. None of these is associated with any of His creatures. It is from such freedom of submission to others that all virtues and moral principles originate. For all these are directed to the overall goal of seeking God's pleasure, and their basic objective is to acquire the moral standards acceptable to God. Hence, they are free of all egotism and hypocrisy and of currying favour with any creature. That is the essence of Islamic morality.

We are then given some of the components behind Islam's moral concept. We see that Islamic society is based on honesty, fairness, and the prohibition of all illegitimate gains. It ensures that private talks and collaborations are aimed at what is good and beneficial, refraining from foul and abusive language except in the case of the oppressed. In this way, it promotes kindly intercession, friendly greetings, outlaws all indecency and sexual relations outside the marriage bond, prohibits arrogant behaviour, pride, miserliness, envy and the harbouring of grudges. It promotes mutual co-operation, counselling, forbearance, forgiveness, mutual help, and obedience to the Islamic leadership, etc. We will discuss all of these in detail when commenting on the relevant verses. However, we will only refer here to a single and remarkable incident which demonstrates the sublime heights which mankind can only attain under Islam, and in a community conducting its life according to its precepts.

Whilst the Jews of Madinah were scheming endlessly against Islam, the Prophet and the Muslim community as a whole, the Qur'ān was moulding that community with great care, raising its standards of morality and giving it the proper motivation to always aspire to ideals that cannot be compromised. Then an incident occurred involving a Jewish individual.

God commanded the Muslim community to maintain absolute honesty and complete justice between all people, regardless of their race, belief, ethnic origin or nationality. (Verses 58 and 135.) Then a whole passage, running into eleven verses, was revealed to acquit a Jewish person from an unfair accusation levelled against him by a group of Muslims who had not yet fully understood these principles and the need to implement them in practice. They were still influenced by practices of the old, pre-Islamic days. Hence, loyalty to clan and blood relations induced them to divert the blame for a certain offence from one of their number to the Jew. The

incident involved the theft of some body armour. A number of Muslims testified in front of the Prophet against the Jew. The Prophet was about to issue a sentence against the Jew, which would have implemented the prescribed punishment for theft. That would have meant punishment of an innocent person, while the real culprit would have escaped.

This passage was revealed containing as it does a clear reproach of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and a strong reprimand for a group of the people of Madinah who had given refuge and support to the Prophet. And what was the cause of all this blame and censure? The only purpose was to do justice to one Jew who belonged to a group that was very hostile to the Prophet and his message, engaging in unceasing, wicked scheming against all the Muslims. The passage issues very stern warnings to anyone who commits a sin or an offence and then wilfully puts the blame on another innocent person. Thus, the passage represents a clear ascendance towards the sublime. The passage to read in this connection runs from verse 105 to verse 116.

What can we say except that it is only the unique method of the Qur'ān and Islam that can pick up a human community from the depths of ignorance and darkness and take it by the hand along an inclining path until it attains sublimity. All this within a short period of time.

1
Fair Inheritance for All

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم
مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ
مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَآءً ۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ
ٱلَّذِى تَسَآءَلُونَ بِهِۦ وَٱلْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ﴿١﴾

Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship. Indeed, God is ever watching over you. (1)

وَءَاتُواْ ٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰٓ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَتَبَدَّلُواْ
ٱلْخَبِيثَ بِٱلطَّيِّبِ ۖ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوٓاْ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ إِلَىٰٓ
أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ حُوبًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

Give the orphans their property. Do not substitute bad things of your own for their good things, and do not absorb their wealth into your own wealth. That is surely a great crime. (2)

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُواْ فِى ٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ
فَٱنكِحُواْ مَا طَابَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ مَثْنَىٰ
وَثُلَٰثَ وَرُبَٰعَ ۖ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُواْ
فَوَٰحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ
أَدْنَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعُولُواْ ﴿٣﴾

If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans, you may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess. That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice. (3)

وَءَاتُواْ ٱلنِّسَآءَ صَدُقَٰتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً ۚ فَإِن طِبْنَ
لَكُمْ عَن شَىْءٍ مِّنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيٓـًٔا
مَّرِيٓـًٔا ﴿٤﴾

Give women their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own accord, choose to give up to you a part of it, then you may take it

with pleasure. (4)

وَلَا تُؤۡتُواْ ٱلسُّفَهَآءَ أَمۡوَٰلَكُمُ ٱلَّتِى جَعَلَ
ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ قِيَـٰمًا وَٱرۡزُقُوهُمۡ فِيهَا وَٱكۡسُوهُمۡ
وَقُولُواْ لَهُمۡ قَوۡلاً مَّعۡرُوفًا ﴿٥﴾

Do not give to the feeble-minded your wealth which God has assigned to you in trust. Make provisions for them and clothe them out of it and speak to them in a kindly way. (5)

وَٱبۡتَلُواْ ٱلۡيَتَـٰمَىٰ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغُواْ ٱلنِّكَاحَ
فَإِنۡ ءَانَسۡتُم مِّنۡہُمۡ رُشۡدًا فَٱدۡفَعُوٓاْ إِلَيۡہِمۡ
أَمۡوَٲلَهُمۡ‌ۖ وَلَا تَأۡكُلُوهَآ إِسۡرَافًا وَبِدَارًا أَن
يَكۡبَرُواْ‌ۚ وَمَن كَانَ غَنِيًّا فَلۡيَسۡتَعۡفِفۡ‌ۖ وَمَن
كَانَ فَقِيرًا فَلۡيَأۡكُلۡ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ‌ۚ فَإِذَا
دَفَعۡتُمۡ إِلَيۡہِمۡ أَمۡوَٲلَهُمۡ فَأَشۡهِدُواْ عَلَيۡہِمۡ‌ۚ
وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ حَسِيبًا ﴿٦﴾

Test the orphans [in your charge] until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them of sound judgement, hand over to them their property, and do not consume it by wasteful and hasty spending before they come of age. Let him who is rich abstain generously [from his ward's property], but he who is poor may partake of it in a fair manner. When you hand over to them their property, let there be witnesses on their behalf. God is sufficient as a reckoner. (6)

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ ٱلۡوَٲلِدَانِ
وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَآءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ
ٱلۡوَٲلِدَانِ وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنۡهُ أَوۡ
كَثُرَ‌ۚ نَصِيبًا مَّفۡرُوضًا ﴿٧﴾

Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind; whether it be little or much. It is an apportioned share. (7)

وَإِذَا حَضَرَ ٱلۡقِسۡمَةَ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ
وَٱلۡيَتَـٰمَىٰ وَٱلۡمَسَـٰكِينُ فَٱرۡزُقُوهُم مِّنۡهُ
وَقُولُواْ لَهُمۡ قَوۡلاً مَّعۡرُوفًا ﴿٨﴾

When other kinsfolk, orphans and needy persons are present at the distribution of inheritance, give them something out of it, and speak to them in a kindly way. (8)

وَلۡيَخۡشَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَوۡ تَرَكُواْ مِنۡ خَلۡفِهِمۡ
ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعَـٰفًا خَافُواْ عَلَيۡہِمۡ فَلۡيَتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ
وَلۡيَقُولُواْ قَوۡلاً سَدِيدًا ﴿٩﴾

Let those who, if they themselves had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account, be afraid (to wrong the orphans in their charge), let them fear God

and speak in a just manner. (9)

Those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, only swallow fire into their bellies. They will be made to endure a blazing fire. (10)

God has this to enjoin on you with regard to your children: The male shall have a share equal to that of two females. If there are more than two women, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one- half of it. As for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having a child; but if he leaves no children, and his parents be his heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, his mother shall have one-sixth after (deducting) any bequest he may have made, or any outstanding debt. With regard to your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is of more benefit to you. This is, therefore, an ordinance from God. God is All-Knowing, Wise. (11)

You shall inherit one-half of what your wives leave behind, provided that they have left no child; but if they have left a child, then you shall have one-quarter of what they leave behind, after [deducting] any bequest they may have made or any outstanding debt. And they (i.e. your widows) shall inherit one-quarter of what you leave behind, provided that you have left no child; but if you have left a child, then they shall have one-eighth of what you

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَٰلَ ٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ ظُلْمًا
إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِى بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا ۖ
وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيرًا ﴿١٠﴾

يُوصِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِىٓ أَوْلَٰدِكُمْ ۖ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ
حَظِّ ٱلْأُنثَيَيْنِ ۚ فَإِن كُنَّ نِسَآءً فَوْقَ ٱثْنَتَيْنِ
فَلَهُنَّ ثُلُثَا مَا تَرَكَ ۖ وَإِن كَانَتْ وَٰحِدَةً فَلَهَا
ٱلنِّصْفُ ۚ وَلِأَبَوَيْهِ لِكُلِّ وَٰحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا
ٱلسُّدُسُ مِمَّا تَرَكَ إِن كَانَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِن
لَّمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلَدٌ وَوَرِثَهُۥٓ أَبَوَاهُ فَلِأُمِّهِ
ٱلثُّلُثُ ۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَهُۥٓ إِخْوَةٌ فَلِأُمِّهِ ٱلسُّدُسُ
ۚ مِنۢ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ يُوصِى بِهَآ أَوْ دَيْنٍ ۗ
ءَابَآؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَآؤُكُمْ لَا تَدْرُونَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ
لَكُمْ نَفْعًا ۚ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ
عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١١﴾

۞ وَلَكُمْ نِصْفُ مَا تَرَكَ أَزْوَٰجُكُمْ إِن
لَّمْ يَكُن لَّهُنَّ وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَهُنَّ
وَلَدٌ فَلَكُمُ ٱلرُّبُعُ مِمَّا تَرَكْنَ ۚ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
وَصِيَّةٍ يُوصِينَ بِهَآ أَوْ دَيْنٍ ۚ
وَلَهُنَّ ٱلرُّبُعُ مِمَّا تَرَكْتُمْ إِن لَّمْ يَكُن
لَّكُمْ وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمْ وَلَدٌ فَلَهُنَّ
ٱلثُّمُنُ مِمَّا تَرَكْتُم ۚ مِّنۢ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ
تُوصُونَ بِهَآ أَوْ دَيْنٍ ۗ

leave behind, after [deducting] any bequest you may have made or any outstanding debt.

If a man or a woman has no heir in the direct line, but has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall inherit one-sixth; but if there be more, then they shall share in one-third, after [deducting] any bequest which may have been made or any outstanding debt, neither of which having been intended to harm [the heirs]. This is a commandment from God; and God is All-Knowing, Gracious. (12)

وَإِن كَانَ رَجُلٌ يُورَثُ كَلَٰلَةً أَوِ ٱمۡرَأَةٌ
وَلَهُۥٓ أَخٌ أَوۡ أُخۡتٌ فَلِكُلِّ وَٰحِدٍ مِّنۡهُمَا
ٱلسُّدُسُۚ فَإِن كَانُوٓاْ أَكۡثَرَ مِن ذَٰلِكَ
فَهُمۡ شُرَكَآءُ فِي ٱلثُّلُثِۚ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ وَصِيَّةٍ
يُوصَىٰ بِهَآ أَوۡ دَيۡنٍ غَيۡرَ مُضَآرٍّۚ وَصِيَّةً مِّنَ
ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٌ ١٢

These are the bounds set by God. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger, him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow, there to dwell forever. That is the supreme triumph. (13)

تِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِۚ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُۥ يُدۡخِلۡهُ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجۡرِي مِن
تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ وَذَٰلِكَ
ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١٣

But whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, and transgresses His bounds, him will He commit to the fire, there to abide forever; and shameful torment awaits him. (14)

وَمَن يَعۡصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَيَتَعَدَّ
حُدُودَهُۥ يُدۡخِلۡهُ نَارًا خَٰلِدًا فِيهَا وَلَهُۥ
عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ١٤

Overview

This first passage of this *sūrah* begins with a verse which reminds people that they all have one Lord and a single Creator, that they descend from the same origin and belong to one family. It defines the unit of humanity as the individual and makes the family the unit of society. It emphasises the importance of fearing God and fostering ties of kinship in order to build on this basis all the obligations of mutual care and support, as well as compassion within the family and within humanity as a single

whole. All the legislation and regulations included in this *sūrah* take into account the twin obligations of fearing God and of fostering ties of kinship.

In this opening passage of the *sūrah,* the duties and legal provisions concerning orphans are outlined, thus providing protection for those who are normally weak within both the family and society. These provisions define the way in which orphans and their property should be looked after. They also regulate how inheritance takes place within the family and the various shares of different relatives according to a whole range of situations. All this relates to the fundamental principle stated in this opening verse, reminders of which are given at the beginning, middle or end of other verses. The emphasis being on the relationship between these regulations and legal provisions and the One who enacts them, the Supreme Lord Who alone has the right to legislate.

Mankind Begins with a Single Person

> *Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship. Indeed, God is ever watching over you.* (Verse 1)

This address is made to mankind, in their basic human quality, so that they may all turn to their Lord who has created them "*from a single soul*". He further created from this single soul its mate, *"and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women."* (Verse 1)

These simple and basic facts are very profound, having much weight in human considerations. Had people been truly mindful of these facts, it would have brought about great changes in their lives, helping them to move from their state of ignorance to a state of intelligence, whereby they would be able to receive proper guidance and accept the true faith. They would, thus, have been able to build a true civilisation worthy of man, the creature who acknowledges God as his Lord and Creator.

These facts open up a very wide scope for us to reflect upon. Firstly, they remind us of our origins, and of the fact that we belong to our Creator who has established us on this earth. People are often oblivious to this fact, forget everything and, consequently, cannot establish anything in their lives on a sound basis.

Man came into this world after a period of time when the world existed without him. Who, then, brought him into this world? He has not come into it by his own will. Prior to his arrival he had no definite existence, and no will with which to decide whether to enter this world or not. Man's arrival in this world is, thus, the result of a will other than his own. It is this will which decided to create man, and

which chose and defined his way for him. It has given him his existence with all its special characteristics, his talents and potentials. It has given him the ability to deal with the universe into which he has been brought without any prior preparation except that given him by this same will. Needless to say, that will is omnipotent in the sense that it is able to do whatever it may wish and determine. If people would only remember this fact they would be able to recognise the true path from the very outset.

This will, which has brought man into this world, outlined for him his way of life and gave him the ability to deal with the universe. It is the only will which can influence human life in any way it wishes, knows everything about man and can best manage his affairs. It is the only will which has the right to define for man his source of life, promulgate laws and regulations for human life, and lay down values and standards for man to observe. To this will alone people must refer whenever they differ over anything. When they do this, they refer to the one constitution which God wants mankind to implement.

Secondly, these facts suggest that all humanity, which has issued from a single will, share together in a single kinship and have the same origin and lineage: *"Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women."* (Verse 1)

Had people been mindful of this fact, they would have paid little or no attention to all the differences that came into their lives at a later time. Differences which led to discrimination between the descendants of a single soul and to the severance of ties of a single universal kinship. All these differences are purely circumstantial and should never have been allowed to take precedence over the tie of kinship and its claim to be fostered, the tie of belonging to one soul which deserves to be maintained, and the tie of belonging to the one Lord who must be feared.

Had this fact been truly appreciated, it would have ensured that no racial discrimination could ever take place in human society. We know how much mankind has suffered from racial discrimination and continues to suffer even today, in a latter day ignorance that seeks to consolidate its own existence through discrimination between people on the basis of their colour or race. It upholds the ties of race and nationality and totally ignores the ties of a single humanity and a single Godhead.

Had this fact been well established, there would have never been the sort of caste system which we find in pagan India, or the sort of class war which leads to much bloodshed in Communist countries. In modern ignorance, this class war is considered to be a doctrinal basis that legitimises the supremacy of one class and the destruction of all others. It chooses to be totally oblivious to the fact that all human

beings have issued from a single soul, and that they all have the same Lord to whom they should all refer.

The third fact stated in this opening verse is that from a single soul God *"created its mate"*. Had mankind appreciated this fact, they would have spared themselves all those grievous mistakes under which they have long suffered. They would not have coined such absurdities about women, branding them as the source of impurity and the origin of evil. The truth is that in her nature and temperament, the woman is created from the first human soul in order to be its mate and, thereafter, for numerous men and women to issue forth from them both. There is no difference between man and woman, then, in their nature or origin. The only difference is in their abilities and the roles they have to play. Mankind has groped blindly in this maze of absurd beliefs for a very long time. Women were deprived of their human status, all human characteristics together with all the rights to which their humanity entitles them for no other reason than an absurd, groundless belief that temporarily took hold of man's mind. When mankind recognised its gross mistake and set about correcting it, we find that the other extreme was adopted, one whereby women were left without any check or control. They had forgotten that man and woman are two mutually complementary human beings. They are not identical individuals, but a pair, each part of which complements the other. The Divine constitution brings mankind back to this elementary fact after it has strayed far from it.

This opening verse also suggests that the family is the cornerstone of human life. God's will has determined that this new creation on earth begins with one family. He created first a single soul, before creating from it its mate. Together, they formed a family and a married couple. "*And from the two of them He spread abroad so many men and women.*" Had He so wished, God could from the very outset have created many men and women, and paired them in couples to form different families. This could have been accomplished without any relationship between them except that they all derive their existence from the will of God, the single deity in the universe. He — limitless is He in His glory — has willed, for a definite purpose of His own, to complement man's tie with his Lord, which is the one from which all ties and relationships are derived, with the tie of kinship. He, therefore, formed the first family from a male and female who came from one soul and shared a single nature. From this first family He spread a multitude of men and women who all share in their tie with their Lord and in their family tie upon which human life is built. It is for this reason that the Islamic system takes so much care of the family and tries to strengthen its ties. It protects the family structure against all influences that may weaken it. Most prominent of these is deviation from human nature which leads to neglecting the abilities and potentials of both man and woman and the essential harmony that makes of these abilities and potentials a complete and coherent whole.

Emphasis is laid in this and other *sūrahs* on the numerous aspects of the care the Islamic system takes of the family. Indeed, the family cannot establish its solid foundation when women are treated with the cruelty and degradation they receive in every ignorant society. For this reason, Islam tries hard to remove that cruelty and elevate women to a position of dignity.

Finally, we are called upon to look at that great variety in people's characteristics and abilities, after they have all spread out of a single soul and a single family. No two individuals are exactly the same although as many generations as we can imagine have come and gone and despite the creation of a great many individuals in every generation. There is a great variety in shapes and features; in habits, temperaments, manners and feelings; as well as in abilities, concerns and functions. A glance at this great variety exhibited by mankind demonstrates God's creative ability which is without parallel and which designs its creation on the basis of its knowledge and wisdom. It is enough to cast our minds and eyes around that remarkable living parade of humanity, looking at that ever-renewing multitude of forms which could not have been made except by God. Indeed, no one has dared to attribute his or her creation to anyone other than God. It is only an absolute, limitless will that can achieve such an endless variety from a single source and origin.

To reflect on the creation of people in this way is enough to give a pleasant feeling to our hearts. It strengthens our faith and enhances our sense of fearing God. This is no trifling gain.

At the end of this opening verse, which stimulates all these thoughts, man is given a reminder to fear God in whose name people appeal to one another, and to be mindful of their ties of kinship which makes of them all a single entity: *"Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship."* (Verse 1) It is in the name of God that you make pledges and covenants with one another, and in His name you ask one another to fulfil your duties and obligations, and with His name you swear to one another in order to confirm what you are saying. Hence, you must fear Him in your approach to whatever exists between you of relationships, contacts and transactions.

When we speak of fearing God and of being mindful of our duties towards Him, we speak of something we know well because it is frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān. This verse uses the same verb in reference to ties of kinship, as if it says that we must "fear" our ties of kinship. This is a remarkable expression which imparts certain connotations that one can hardly find words to explain. "Fear" your ties of kinship. Enhance your feelings so that you may appreciate the relationships they create and the obligations they constitute. You can then take care never to do any injustice to your kinsfolk and never to treat them badly. Be mindful lest you cause harm to your kinsfolk or offend them. Value your ties of kinship as you value your

treasures.

The verse concludes with the statement: *"Indeed God is ever watching over you."* (Verse 1) That is enough to give us a feeling of awe when we remember that God, the Creator who knows those whom He has created and who allows no action or feeling to escape His knowledge is the One who is ever watching over us.

When Orphans Come of Age

This powerful opening to the *sūrah* is followed with an outline of the foundation upon which the Islamic social system is built: mutual co-operation within the family and the community, care for the weak and vulnerable, protection and honour for women, looking after the property of the community, and the distribution of inheritance among heirs according to a system which ensures justice to individuals and prosperity to the community.

Guardians of orphans are commanded here to hand over to them all their property when they have attained the age associated with sound judgement. Moreover, they are commanded not to marry under-age orphan girls who are in their charge in the hope of absorbing their wealth. As for the weak-minded who, it is feared, will squander their wealth once it is given to them, they should not be handed their property, because it, in fact, belongs to the community which has an interest in it. Hence, it should not he given up to anyone who may use it improperly. Men are also ordered to maintain justice and fairness in their treatment of women generally.

> *Give the orphans their property. Do not substitute bad things of your own for their good things, and do not absorb their wealth into your own wealth. That is surely a great crime.* (Verse 2) *If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans, you may many of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess. That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice.* (Verse 3) *Give women their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own accord, choose to give up to you a part of it, then you may take it with pleasure.* (Verse 4) *Do not give to the feeble-minded your wealth which God has assigned to you in trust. Make provisions for them and clothe them out of it and speak to them in a kindly way.* (Verse 5) *Test the orphans [in your charge] until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them of sound judgement, hand over to them their property, and do not consume it by wasteful and hasty spending before they come of age. Let him who is rich abstain generously [from his wards property] but he who is poor may partake of it in a fair manner. When you hand over to them their property, let there be witnesses on their behalf. God is sufficient as a reckoner.* (Verse 6)

These emphatic orders give us an impression of what was common practice in the

days of ignorance in pre-Islamic Arabia where the rights of the weak in general, and orphans and women in particular, were either usurped or denied them altogether. Some of these practices continued to exist in the Muslim community, which was originally carved out of the ignorant Arabian society, until the Qur'ān began to eradicate them altogether. At the same time, the Qur'ān gave the Muslim community new concepts, aspirations, traditions and a whole new face with distinctive features. *"Give the orphans their property. Do not substitute bad things of your own for their good things, and do not absorb their wealth into your own wealth. That is surely a great crime."* (Verse 2)

The Muslims are ordered here to give to the orphans what belongs to them of property that is under their control. They must not exchange any good part of it for something inferior of their own, such as taking their good land, cattle, shares or cash — for even cash may differ a great deal in value — or any other property in which value differences occur. They must not absorb the wealth of the orphans, in whole or in part, by joining it to their own property. Any such action is a great sin which God here warns the Muslim community against.

All these practices were known in the first society to be addressed by this verse. Their mention suggests that at least some of the addressees practised some of these ways, inherited as they were from the days of ignorance. In every ignorant society such practices are committed. We even see examples of these in our present-day ignorance, in our cities, towns and villages. Orphans' property is often absorbed or squandered by their guardians in spite of all the legal precautions and safeguards and in spite of the official institutions which are specifically set up to protect the interests and the property of minors. This is a problem wherein legislation and official control cannot seem to make any great headway. Success depends on one element, namely, fear of God. It is this fear that watches over our minds and consciences, and this, in turn, gives to legislation its value and proper effect. This is exactly what happened after this verse was revealed. Guardians began to act with much greater caution, so much so that they separated the property of any orphan in their charge from their own property. Moreover, they even separated the orphans' food from their own; this to guard against any possibility of committing what God warned them of as a great crime.

Life on earth cannot be set right merely by legal provisions and regulations, unless they are backed by an inner motive to implement them. This can only be provided by a fear of God. This fear of God does not come strongly into action, in relation to regulations and legal provisions, except when these are enacted by the One who knows what is in people's minds and watches over their consciences. When this occurs, anyone who contemplates violating the law is bound to feel that he is disobeying God and contradicting His will. He also knows that God is aware of his

intentions and actions. Once he remembers this, he trembles and is overwhelmed by fear. He remembers that he must abide by God's law.

God knows very well His servants, their nature and their psychology, since it is He who created them. For this reason, He has made the law and the code of living His own in order to impart to them of His own authority. Thus, they acquire respect that they cannot otherwise have. God is aware that no law is ever obeyed well unless it comes from the One who is genuinely feared, because people know that He is aware of all intentions and feelings. People may obey the law enacted by their fellow human beings when it is backed by force and authority and when there is some form of supervision to ensure the implementation of that law. That supervision, however, cannot monitor what is in people's minds. People will inevitably try to break the law whenever they have a chance or whenever the supervising authority cannot detect their violation. They will always feel unduly checked, and they will always try to break loose whenever a chance to do so presents itself to them.

Conditions for Marrying an Orphan Girl

`Urwah ibn al-Zubair, a scholar from the generation following that of the Prophet's Companions, relates that he once asked `Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, about this verse which states: *"But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess. That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice."* (Verse 3) She said: "Nephew, this refers to an orphan girl being brought up by her guardian and she is his partner in his property. He is attracted to her because of her property and beauty, and he wishes to marry her without being fair to her in her dower and without giving her what someone else would have given. People are therefore not allowed, on the basis of this verse, to marry those orphans unless they treat them fairly and give them the maximum dower girls in their station would have had. They are further ordered to marry other women instead."

`Urwah also relates on the authority of `Ā'ishah that the Prophet's Companions sought his ruling on the whole question after this verse was revealed. By way of answer and assistance, another verse of this *sūrah* was revealed: *"They ask you for rulings concerning women. Say, God [Himself] gives you His rulings concerning them, as well as what is conveyed to you through this Book about orphan women whom you deny what has been assigned to them, and you are disinclined to marry them; ..."* (Verse 127) `Ā'ishah further says: "God's statement in this other verse, *i.e. 'and whom you are disinclined to marry',* refers to their reluctance to marry orphan girls when they are neither wealthy nor beautiful. They are, therefore, told that they must not marry those orphan girls to whom they are attracted because of their wealth and beauty unless they are fair to

them. This is due to the fact that they do not consider marrying them when they lack wealth and beauty." (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

This *ĥadīth,* as related by `Ā'ishah, describes some of the practices and traditions of ignorant, pre-Islamic Arabia that continued to be practised in the Muslim community, that is until the Qur'ān had its say about them. The Qur'ān is here forbidding such practices and removing them from the Muslim community, with such wise directives that place the onus for their appropriate observation on people's consciences. The Qur'ānic verse starts with: *"If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans."* (Verse 3) It is, then, a question of taking precautions and making sure to be on the safe side, fearing God's punishment, when a guardian suspects that he is not extending fair treatment to an orphan girl in his care. The verse is general and does not speak of any particular area where fairness is essential. What it requires is that orphans must be treated fairly, in every sense of the word and in all situations, whether relating to dowry or to any other aspect. If a guardian seeks to marry an orphan girl for her money, then he is motivated by his desire to absorb her property, and not by any affection he has for her or by any feeling that her personality makes her a suitable wife for him. Unfairness also arises when a guardian marries an orphan girl regardless of the wide differences in age between them. This makes a happily married life rather untenable, and does not give due consideration to the girl's feelings in the matter. Indeed, she may be unable to express her feelings, either out of shyness or because she fears that if she disobeys her guardian, he will squander her wealth. Many other situations and circumstances may make it difficult to maintain fairness. The Qur'ān, therefore, appoints one's conscience as well as fear of God as the watch guards. The opening verse of this *sūrah,* which sets the scene for all these legal provisions and directives, is concluded with the reminder: *"God is ever watching over you."*

When guardians are unsure about their ability to maintain fairness with orphan girls in their charge, they should turn elsewhere for marriage. In this way they remove all suspicions of dealing unfairly with their ward: *"If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans, you may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess. That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice."* (Verse 3)

It is necessary to explain this concession with regard to polygamy. Essentially, the reservation stipulates that if one fears that one cannot maintain fairness between one's wives, then only one wife should be married, or one should confine oneself to those whom one's right hand possesses. It is indeed useful to explain this concession because in these modern times of ours, people are often boastful of their acquired knowledge. They claim for themselves an insight into man's life, nature and interests

which surpasses that of their Lord who has created them. They make their judgement on different matters according to their desires and on the basis of their ignorance and blindness. In doing so, they behave as if new circumstances and needs have become more pressing today than when they were taken into consideration by God when He enacted His legislation for mankind. Such a claim combines ignorance and blindness with impudence and bad manners and adds them all to total disbelief. Such boastful statements are repeated again and again, with no one caring to prevent such ignorance. They represent a very rude affront to God, His law and constitution, without fear of any reproach or punishment. Indeed, those who repeat such affronts receive their wages from those who take it upon themselves to try to undermine Islam.

We need to approach this question of the qualified permission of polygamy in Islam with ease, clarity and decisiveness. We will set clearly all the real and practical circumstances that are relevant to it.

Al-Bukhārī relates that when Ghailān ibn Salamah al-Thaqafī embraced Islam he had ten wives. The Prophet said to him: "Choose four of them." Abū Dāwūd quotes `Umairah al-Asadī as saying: "I had eight wives when I accepted Islam. I told the Prophet (peace be upon him) of this fact, and he said to me: `Choose four of them.'" Al-Shāfi`ī relates that Nawfal ibn Mu`āwiyah al-Dailamī said: "When I became a Muslim I had five women. God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said to me: 'Choose four of them, any four you like, and divorce the other one.'"

When Islam was first revealed, men very often had ten or more wives and this without any limits or restrictions. Islam then made it clear that there is a limit which a Muslim cannot exceed, this being four wives. Furthermore, it imposed a qualification, namely, the ability to maintain fair treatment among all wives. Otherwise, a man must limit himself to one wife, or to bondwomen. Islam, therefore, set restrictions that were not formerly present. It has not left the matter for men to do as they please. It has made polygamy conditional upon fair treatment. Otherwise, the concession is withdrawn.

The question then arises as to why has Islam allowed this concession.

Reasons for Permitting Polygamy

Islam is a practical and positive system for human life, which is consistent with human nature and with man's constitution, needs, requirements and changing circumstances in all areas and all generations. It is a system which deals with man as he is, and in the situation it finds him in, elevating him to heights he can never otherwise achieve, without in any way denouncing his natural desires or suppressing his nature or overlooking his practical needs. Moreover, Islam

approaches man gently. It does not resort to violent or arbitrary pushing to force him to move in the direction it wants.

Islam does not raise the spectre of hollow idealism, or dreamy theorisation that clashes with man's nature and the needs of his practical life. It is a system that cares about man's morality and the purity of society. It does not allow a situation to exist if this is likely to lead to the weakening of moral values and the corruption of society. It works for the creation of a social order that promotes moral values and the purity of society with minimum effort on the parts of both the individual and society.

We have to keep all these essential qualities of the Islamic system in view when we look at the question of polygamy. We see firstly that there have always been many practical cases, in different societies, in the past and in the present, where the number of women of marriageable age exceed the number of men who may get married. It has never been known in history that such an imbalance which can affect certain societies has ever exceeded the ratio of four to one. It is always within that limit. How do we deal with this imbalance which happens from time to time in different ratios and societies and which cannot be overlooked? Do we simply shrug our shoulders and do nothing? Do we leave it without treatment until it settles down according to whatever circumstances may come to prevail?

Shrugging our shoulders does not solve any problem. Leaving society to deal with such a situation at random is something no serious man who respects the human race would contemplate. Action must be taken and a system must be devised. Here we find ourselves facing three alternatives:

1. Each man who is fit to get married marries one woman of marriageable age. Therefore, one woman or more, according to the ratio of imbalance, will inevitably remain outside marriage, going through her life without ever knowing a man.
2. Every man who can marry gets married to one woman in a healthy, legitimate relationship. He, then, has an affair or a short-term relationship with one or more of the women who do not have legitimate male partners. In this way, these women associate with men in an illegitimate and hypocritical way.
3. Men who are able to get married, or some of them, actually marry more than one wife. In this way, the second woman associates with a man as an honourable wife, in broad daylight, not as a mistress or as an occasional partner in an illegitimate relationship practised under the cover of darkness.

The first alternative clashes with human nature and places a great burden on the woman who is made to go through life without ever having a man with whom to share her life. This fact cannot be ignored even on the basis of idealistic claims that

argue when a woman works and earns her own living she does not need a man. The need goes much deeper than such superficiality. Neither a job nor a high income can replace a woman's natural need to live normally with a man, to satisfy her physical urges as well as her emotional and spiritual needs, and to have a companion with whom to share her life. A man works and earns his living, yet this too is not enough for him. Therefore, he seeks a partner and a companion. Men and women are alike in this regard, because they descend from a single soul.

The second alternative is in sharp conflict with Islam, the religion of purity, and with Islamic society which is based on serious morality and with woman's human dignity in mind. Those who do not care when immorality spreads in society are the very people who boast that they know better than God and impudently criticise God's law because there is no one to stop them. Indeed, they find every encouragement and help from those who are keen to undermine the Islamic faith.

It is the third alternative that Islam adopts as a qualified concession to a situation that cannot be dealt with by simply shrugging our shoulders or by espousing hollow idealism. Such a choice is in keeping with Islam's seriousness and practicality in dealing with man as he is, taking full account of his changing circumstances. It is this approach which fits perfectly with the importance Islam attaches to decency, purity and morality as it tries to elevate man to its great height in an easy, gentle and practical way.

From another point of view, we see in all human societies, ancient and modern, past, present and future, another real problem that cannot be overlooked or brushed aside. The period of a man's fertility extends to the age of 70, sometimes even beyond. In the case of women, fertility ends at around the age of 50. This means that there are on average 20 years of fertility in a man's life with no corresponding fertility in a woman. There is no doubt that one of the purposes of joining the two different sexes in marriage is to promote life through procreation and to build the earth through increases in population. It does not fit with this natural situation to prevent humanity from making use of man's longer period of fertility. What fits with this practical situation is that legislation that is applicable to all societies in all ages should provide this concession, not as an obligation, but as an option to benefit human life in general. This balancing between human nature as it is and the purpose of legislation is always evident in Divine law, while it is generally absent in man-made laws. Left to himself, man cannot take into account all details, he cannot look at a situation from all angles, and cannot provide for all eventualities.

One aspect that relates directly to the second fact is a man's need at times to satisfy his natural desire while his wife does not care about it, either because of her age or because of illness. Both man and wife, however, are keen to preserve their married life and do not entertain the idea of separation or divorce. So how do we deal with

such cases? Do we simply shrug our shoulders and leave the man and his wife to bang their heads against the wall? Or do we resort to hollow idealism and flowery words which have no practical effect? Once again, the shrugging of shoulders solves nothing and hollow idealism has no relevance to serious considerations affecting human life. Here again, we find ourselves faced with three alternatives:

1. We forbid the man from seeking satisfaction of his natural desires by the force of law. We say to him: "Shame on you. What you are thinking of is unbecoming and does not take account of the rights and dignity of the woman who is married to you.
2. We allow the man to have illegitimate relationships with other women.
3. We allow the man to marry again, as the situation requires, without having to divorce his first wife.

The first alternative is in sharp conflict with human nature, and weighs very heavily on man mentally. If we were to impose it by force of law, its immediate result would be to leave the man resenting, if not hating, his married life because of the pressures it imposes on him. Islam, which views the family home as a place of rest and peace and views the married couple as intimate companions, does not approve of this alternative.

The second alternative clashes with Islam's moral concept as also its method of elevating human life and establishing it on foundations of perfect purity. Only a life of such purity is worthy of God's honoured creature, man.

The third alternative is the only one which satisfies the needs of human nature and which fits in with the Islamic moral code. It allows the first wife to continue to enjoy married life, satisfies the desire of both man and wife to remain together as intimate companions, and helps to elevate man with ease and practicality.

A situation akin to this occurs when a woman cannot have children while the man cherishes his natural desire to do so. He is then faced with one of two alternatives. He either divorces his wife to marry another who can give him children, or he keeps his first wife, maintaining his loyalty to her, and marries another. Some men, and even women, will pedantically argue that the first alternative is better. Ninety-nine women out of every hundred will undoubtedly curse anyone who advises a husband to take a course of action that destroys their family life without any practical return. It is extremely unlikely that a woman known to be unable to bear children will find another husband. On the other hand, many a childless woman will be happy to help look after young children born to her husband by his second wife. Inevitably, such children bring joy and happiness to the family home and this rubs off on the first wife even though there will inevitably be a residue of sadness that the children are

not her own.

In contemplating practical life, leaving aside both pedantic arguments and absurdity in trying to solve serious problems, we are bound to appreciate the Divine wisdom that allows this concession. Naturally, it is qualified with the need to maintain fairness: *"You may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one."* (Verse 3) Furthermore, this concession not only protects society from deviation into immorality but also protects the wife from being treated unjustly and safeguards her dignity. Moreover, it maintains justice, which helps tolerate a bitter pill.

No one who knows the spirit of Islam will say that polygamy is desired for its own sake, or for no natural or social need. It has not been permitted so as to satisfy carnal desire nor so as to enable a man to move from one wife to another in the same way as an unscrupulous person moves from one mistress to another. Polygamy is necessary so as to counter situations of emergency. Furthermore, it is a well-qualified solution to a problem.

If a certain generation abuses this concession and men utilise it to make married life nothing more than a means to satisfy their carnal desires, creating the notorious harem, the blame should not be put on Islam's doorstep. Such people do not represent Islam. Indeed, they have sunk so low because they have deviated far away from Islam and have not appreciated its requirements of purity and cleanliness. They do not live in a society where Islam is practised and its law is observed. Their society is not one where an Islamic authority rules according to the Islamic constitution and which implements the laws and directives of Islam observing its moral traditions.

The chaos of the harem and the transformation of married life into a home for carnal desires can only flourish in a hostile society that has broken loose from the laws and constitution of Islam. If we want to reform the situation, we have only to call people to re-adopt Islam and seriously implement its laws and constitution. In this way, we return them to purity, cleanliness and moderation. If we want reform, let us make people return to the implementation of Islam, not only in this particular detail, but in all aspects of life. Islam is a complete system that yields its fruit only when it is implemented in full.

The fairness that needs to be maintained is fairness in treatment, financial support and all practical aspects of married life. Love and feelings are not included in this condition of fairness simply because these are not controlled by man's will. It is in relation to this aspect that God rules out the possibility of maintaining justice between one's wives in a later verse in this *sūrah* which states: *"In no way can you maintain equity between your wives, even though you may be keen to do so. Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of*

suspense." (Verse 129) Some people quote this verse in support of their argument that Islam does not permit polygamy. What we have to remember is that God's law does not permit something in one verse and then forbid it in another, like one who takes away with his right hand what he has given with his left. The fairness required in the earlier verse is that which relates to treatment, financial support and other practical aspects of married life. It is when one feels unable to maintain this type of fairness that one must not marry more than one wife. What this means is that nothing should be withheld from one wife when it is allowed to another. This is what the Prophet, the noblest and fairest man ever to have walked on this earth, used to maintain at the time when everyone around him, including his own wives, were fully aware that he loved `Ā'ishah most, and felt for her what he did not feel for any of his other wives. Hearts and emotions are not subject to our control. They are governed only by God's will. The Prophet, who knew his religion well and knew his heart well, used to say: "My Lord, this is my fair allocation in what I control. Do not blame me for that which You control and I do not."

To recap, Islam has not started polygamy but rather restricted it. It does not order its followers to be polygamous, but it allows them a qualified concession to marry more than one wife so as to solve some problems in human life and to satisfy the needs of human nature. Here, we have mentioned some of these needs and problems that are currently recognisable. However, there may be other purposes which will become apparent over the course of time, as happens with regard to every legislation or directive included in the Divine constitution. People in any period of history may not fully appreciate its wisdom and benefits. Nonetheless, wisdom and benefit are presumed to exist in every piece of Divine Legislation, whether they are known or unknown to man.

Relationships with Slave Women

So far we have given due importance to the condition attached by the Qur'ān to the concession to marry more than one wife, namely, fair treatment. When a man fears that he may not be able to abide by that condition, the Qur'ānic verse stipulates certain options that are open to him: *"If you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess."* (Verse 3) This means that where fairness cannot be maintained, marriage should be confined to just one wife. The other alternative touched upon by the phrase *"those whom your right hands possess" refers* to women who are slaves. The statement is expressed in general terms, without specifying formal marriage. We have already spoken about the general question of slavery when we discussed the relevant verses in *Sūrah* 2, The Cow, or *Al-Baqarah.* It is pertinent to add here some brief remarks in

connection with the present verse.

When a slave woman is married, she regains her human dignity. Such a marriage qualifies her and any offspring by her master for freedom, even if he does not actually set her free when he marries her. On the day when she gives birth, she is elevated to the status of "the child's mother". Her master no longer has any right to sell her, and she is free on his death. Her child is free from birth.

Similar conditions apply if her master joins her to himself without marriage. When she gives birth, she gains the status of "the child's mother" and she cannot be sold. On her master's death, she regains her freedom. So does her child by him, if he acknowledges his parenthood as was the general practice.

Both marriage and cohabitation enable a slave woman to gain her freedom. We know that Islam has provided many such methods for slaves to regain their freedom. Still, some of us may feel uneasy about the notion of cohabiting with a slave woman. We should, however, remember here that slavery was an answer to an emergency situation; a position imposed on captives, on the basis of equal treatment, after a legitimate war declared by a Muslim ruler who implements God's law. The same emergency allowed cohabitation with slave women by their masters. When free Muslim women were taken captive, the treatment they received was infinitely worse.

It is also important not to forget that captive women also have desires that must be taken into account by any practical system that caters for man, his natural needs and life situation. Slave women's desires, then, could be satisfied either through marriage or through cohabitation with their masters. The only other alternative would have meant the spread of immorality and unrestrained sexual chaos whether via prostitution or other illegitimate relationships, as was the case in pre-Islamic days.

During certain generations the number of slave-girls rose very sharply through purchase, kidnapping and the like. Large numbers of them were gathered in palaces where they took part in orgies and other disgusting practices of which we have learnt from both true and exaggerated reports. Nothing of this can be either approved of or encouraged by Islam. It cannot be attributed to the Islamic system or added to its history.

The proper Islamic history is that which comes into existence according to Islamic principles, laws and legal provisions. When something which contravenes Islamic laws and principles takes place in a society that claims to be Islamic, it cannot be attributed to Islam. How could it be when it is in conflict with essential Islamic principles?

Islam has its own independent existence that is separate from that which takes place among Muslims in any generation. What we have to remember is that Muslims have not invented Islam. It is Islam that has brought Muslims into existence. Islam is

the origin and Muslims are only its product. What defines the true Islamic system and true Islamic concepts is not what Muslims do or understand, unless this is in full conformity with Islam in its pure form. In other words, Islam is independent from people's practices and understanding. As for people, their behaviour should be evaluated according to Islamic principles in order to determine how far they are truly Islamic or not.

The situation differs in other systems, which are based on human concepts and on creeds and laws that they formulate for themselves. Here, creed and law change in accordance with how attitude is formulated and applied in society. The Islamic system has not been devised by people. It has been laid down for mankind by their Lord who has created them and who provides them with their sustenance. People can choose to implement this system and conduct their affairs according to its principles, and it is this that makes their society part of practical Islam. Alternatively, they can deviate or turn away from it altogether, which means that their social set-up does not belong to Islam. Indeed, it is a deviation from it.

We have to take this fully into account when we consider Islamic history. It is on the basis of this principle that the Islamic theory of history is founded. It differs with all other historical theories that consider what takes place within the community to be the practical interpretation of the doctrine or the creed it adopts. Such theories trace the "evolution" of the doctrine or the creed in the practices of the community which upholds it and in the changing concepts of the theory itself in the intellectual output of that community. To apply this view to Islam in order to define the true Islamic concept is very hazardous since it clashes with the very nature of Islam which is unlike any other creed or system.

The final comment in this verse refers to the purpose behind all these legal provisions. They all aim at maintaining fairness and avoiding injustice: *"That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice."* (Verse 3) All that — including avoiding marrying orphan girls for fear of dealing unjustly by them, marrying other women, including the concession of polygamy on the one hand and limiting oneself to one wife on the other when unfairness if feared, and the legislation concerning slave women — *"makes it more likely that you will not do injustice."* Indeed, each one of these provisions helps to prevent injustice.

The achievement of justice is, then, the overriding motive of this system and the aim of its every detail. It is most important that justice should be observed in the family home, since the family is the basic unit of the whole social structure, and the starting point for community life. It is in the family home that the young are brought up in their formative years. If justice, affection and peace are lacking in the family home, they cannot be realised in society at large.

This opening passage of the *sūrah* now resumes its outline of legal provisions relevant to women, who are indeed the subject matter of much of this *sūrah,* which derives its title from them: *"Give women their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own accord, choose to give up to you a part of it, then you may take it with pleasure."* (Verse 4)

This verse gives every woman a clear and personal right to her marriage portion or dowry. It tells us something of the practices of a society of *ignorance* that undermined this right in a variety of ways. One such method was that a woman's guardian would receive this dowry and use it as his own, as if he had made a sale of a commodity he owned and received a fair price for it. Another such form, the mutual marriage, meant that a woman's guardian would give her in marriage to someone in return for the other giving him in marriage a woman under his own guardianship. Here, one woman is exchanged for another in a deal between the two guardians with the interests of both women totally ignored. It is a deal akin to that of exchanging one animal for another. Islam totally forbids this form of marriage. It considers marriage a unity between two souls on the basis of free choice. The dowry belongs to the woman and she should receive it herself, not her guardian. It requires that the dowry be specified so that the woman can claim it as her own and it should be treated as an obligation that must be fulfilled. Islam further requires the husband to pay it willingly to his wife in the same manner as he gives her an absolutely free gift. If subsequently the woman decides, of her own free choice, to give up part or all of her dowry to her husband, she is free to do so without any sort of pressure whatsoever. In this case, the husband is free to accept what his wife willingly gives him. Relations between the married couple must be based on free choice, on the absence of pressure, and on mutual care and affection. Such a basis leaves no room for reluctance or embarrassment.

Thus, Islam has removed altogether what was inherited from the days of ignorance concerning women and their dowries. It has preserved her right to exercise her authority over her money and has preserved her dignity and position. At the same time, it not only established the marital relationship on strict legal formalities but also left enough room for care and affection to play their role in this shared life and to impart to it their own colour.

Handing Property Over to Orphans

Having finished with this aspect of the discussion of marriage with orphan girls and other women, the *sūrah* again picks up the subject of orphans' inheritance. It provides detailed legislation concerning the handing over of their monies to them, having briefly referred to this in the second verse.

Although this property belongs to orphans, it remains, in essence, the property of

the community given by God so that the community may make its best use of it. It is the community, therefore, which is the primary owner of property in general. Individuals, including orphans and those who have left them this property upon their death, are in charge of it so that they may invest and benefit by it and provide benefit to the community at large. They may undertake this task as long as they are able to prove sound judgement. Individual ownership, with all its rights and restrictions, is based on this principle. Orphans who have property, but who are feeble minded and unable to look after their property wisely, are not given control over it. Although their rights of ownership remain intact and cannot be taken away from them, they are not allowed to administer their property. It belongs, as we have said, to the community. Hence, someone who is able to administer it from the ranks of the community is given charge of it, taking into consideration his degree of kinship to the orphan. Thus, the principle of mutual care within the family, which is the basis of general care within the greater family of the society, is fulfilled. The feeble-minded, however, enjoy the rights of adequate maintenance and clothing out of their property, as well as the right to be treated kindly: *"Do not give to the feeble-minded your wealth which God has assigned to you in trust. Make provisions for them and clothe them out of it, and speak to them in a kindly way."* (Verse 5)

Feeble-mindedness and sound judgement can be easily detected after a person has attained puberty. Such matters are easily recognised, and they do not require any specific definition. The community can always recognise a person of sound judgement as also one with a feeble mind. The community evaluates the behaviour of all. The test, therefore, to make sure that the orphan has reached the age of puberty, which is referred to in the Qur'ānic text by the term "marriage", is the function that can be fulfilled only after the attainment of puberty. *"Test the orphans [in your charge] until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them of sound judgement, hand over to them their property, and do not consume it by wasteful and hasty spending before they come of age. Let him who is rich abstain generously [from his ward's property], but he who is poor may partake of it in a fair manner. When you hand over to them their property, let there be witnesses on their behalf. God is sufficient as a reckoner."* (Verse 6)

We note in this verse the precise nature of the procedure that culminates with the handing over to orphans of their property when they have come of age. The emphasis here is on the need to hand over such property without any delay, once it has been established that an orphan is of sound judgement. It is right that he should receive his property in full. Again, there is strong emphasis on the need to preserve the property of the orphan when he is still a minor. There must be no attempt to consume an orphan's property by wasteful and hasty spending, before the orphan reaches the age when the handing over should take place. Moreover, a guardian who is well off must abstain from taking any part of the proceeds or the principal of an orphan's property in return for administering it. If he is poor, he is allowed to

partake of it within the minimum limits. When the handing over is to be effected, witnesses should be present. The verse concludes with a reminder that God witnesses everything and He takes everything into account: *"God is sufficient as a reckoner"*

Such emphasis and detailed legislation coupled with a variety of warnings and reminders give us the feeling that an orphan's property was frequently absorbed into the property of their guardians during this period of Arabian history. To change such entrenched habits required detailed legislation and emphasis that could leave no room for trickery and deception of any sort.

The Divine method of Islam worked consistently for the eradication of all aspects of ignorance from people's minds and from society at large. This it did while it was establishing all the various aspects of Islam. Its aim was to replace ignorant social characteristics with Islamic ones. A new society was being moulded with its distinctive characteristics, traditions, laws and values. Its paramount aspect was fear of God and the recognition that He watches over people's actions. This is the ultimate guarantee that legislation will be obeyed. No legislation can be guaranteed to work in this life without such fear and recognition: *"God is sufficient as a reckoner."*

Inheritance: A Fair System of Social Security

> *Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind; whether it be little or much. It is an apportioned share.* (Verse 7)

In the days of *jāhiliyyah,* or ignorance, in pre-Islamic Arabia, no share of inheritance was given to females, and little, if any, was given to young boys. The reason being that neither group could fight against any aggressor. God's law, on the other hand, made inheritance due to all kinsfolk, according to their degree of kinship and their shares, which will be detailed later. It is the view of Islam that members of the same family should help and look after one another. Everyone is required to look after his relatives when they are in need, and to share their liability in paying compensation in cases of causing death to or inflicting injury or bodily harm on others. Hence, it is only right that relatives should inherit each other, when they leave behind some property, according to their respective kinship. This gives practical effect to the rule that: "gain is commensurate with liability". Islam is a complete and perfectly coherent system. This is reflected most clearly in the distribution of rights and obligations.

This is the general rule of inheritance. Some people may question the concept of inheritance, but this only betrays their rudeness towards God, their ignorance of

human nature and the requirements of practical life.

It is enough to understand the principles which form the Islamic social system to put an end to such futile arguments. The basic characteristic of this system is mutual care. In order to give mutual care a sound basis, Islam builds its structure on a solid foundation of natural human inclinations that have a basic role to fulfil in human life.

Family ties are genuine and natural. They have not been invented by any generation of humanity, nor indeed by the cumulative wisdom of all generations. These ties have a profound effect on human life, its preservation and betterment. No argument against the seriousness of these ties and their effect is worth any consideration. In view of this, Islam makes mutual care within the family the cornerstone of its system of social care and security. Inheritance is one aspect of that. It is also an essential element of the Islamic economic system.

Should this provision fall short of looking after all cases which need help, the next step, which is care within the local community, will complement it. If this also falls short, then the Islamic state will look after all those who need care after the family and the local community have fulfilled their duties. In this way, the burden is not thrown totally on the shoulders of the state. The reason being that care within the family or the local community is bound to create feelings of compassion which, in turn, promote co-operation in a most natural way. Moreover, these feelings of compassion constitute a net gain for humanity which cannot be dismissed by any person who has the interests of humanity at heart. Furthermore, family care in particular is bound to leave certain effects that are in harmony with human nature. When a person realises that the effort he exerts to improve his situation will also benefit his relatives, especially his offspring, he will have the motive to double his efforts. His increased productivity benefits the community indirectly. Islam does not create barriers between the individual and the community. Whatever an individual owns belongs to the community as a whole when it needs it.

This last rule is enough to make invalid all superficial objections to inheritance, which argue that inheritance gives money to people who have not worked or made an effort for it. The fact is that an heir is an extension of the person from whom he inherits. From another point of view, an heir is the very person to look after his relatives, should he be well off and they be in need. Moreover, all property belongs to the community when it needs it, on the basis of the rules of Islamic social security.

Furthermore, the relationship between testator and heir, especially offspring, is not confined to money and property alone. Relatives, both immediate and extended, also pass on their good and bad tendencies, susceptibility to certain illnesses, physical features, intelligence or the lack of it, and so on. All these inherited aspects stay with those who receive them throughout their lives. They cannot get rid of them,

no matter how hard they try. It is only fair, then, that they should also inherit property when they cannot avoid, even with the help of the state and all its power, inheriting illness, evil tendencies and stupidity.

For all these practical and natural aspects of human life, and for many other social interests, God has laid down the general rule of inheritance: *"Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind; whether it be little or much. It is an apportioned share."* (Verse 7) This is the general principle by which Islam gave women, fourteen centuries ago, the same rights as men to have a share of inheritance and by which it has preserved the rights of youngsters who were treated unfairly during the days of ignorance. Ignorant society looked at individuals according to their value in war and productivity. Islam, which is a Divine code of living, looks first at the human value of man. This is his intrinsic value of which he cannot be deprived. His duties and obligations within the family and the community take a secondary position.

Under the Islamic system of inheritance, some relatives take precedence over others. This means that certain relatives do not inherit anything because those who are nearer of kin to the deceased take precedence over them. Hence, the *sūrah* states that if such relatives attend the division of inheritance, they may have an unspecified share by way of compensation; so that they do not feel deprived when they see the division which otherwise may have given them a share. This helps to promote family ties, bringing relatives closer together. The same verse also states that orphans and needy people also have a similar claim: *"When other kinsfolk, orphans and needy persons are present at the distribution of inheritance, give them something out of it, and speak to them in a kindly way."* (Verse 8)

Different opinions have been reported as being expressed by early Muslim scholars regarding this verse. One opinion states that it was abrogated by those verses which detail the inheritance shares. Another considers that this verse has definitive import. Some say that its message is obligatory while others consider it as only recommended, if the heirs agree to implement it. We do not, however, find any evidence to support the view that it was abrogated. We feel that it provides a definitive ruling which must be implemented in those cases we have already mentioned. Our view is based on the fact that the verse is expressed in general terms, and that Islam promotes mutual care within society. This is different from the specified shares of inheritance which are outlined later in the *sūrah.*

Protecting the Weak and Vulnerable

Before defining the respective shares of inheritance which are due, the *sūrah* gives another warning against absorbing orphans' property. The way the warning is

delivered cannot fail to have a strong effect on people's hearts. It does this by stimulating feelings of love, of compassion for one's own children, of parental fear for them when they are young and weak, and similarly of fear of God who watches over all our actions. It also arouses fear for one's safety in the life to come. The fear of burning in the fire is portrayed here in a very vivid and powerful scene: *"Let those who, if they themselves had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account, be afraid (to wrong the orphans in their charge), let them fear God and speak in a just manner. Those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, only swallow fire into their bellies. They will be made to endure a blazing fire." (*Verses 9-10)

The first verse touches on parental heartstrings, describing typical parental fear for what may happen to their offspring. They are made to imagine their children, weak, defenceless, left alone with no one to protect or have mercy on them. If they think of their own children in this position, they are bound to sympathise with orphans in their own charge. They cannot know whether their own children would be placed in the care of others, in the same way as they are in charge of orphans. It is further impressed on them that they should fear God in their dealings with those in their charge. This so that God will provide their own children with people who fear Him in the way they deal with such orphans and that they be compassionate and take good care of them. They are also told to speak justly to orphans.

Verse 10 portrays a fearful scene with people swallowing fire into their bellies, and suffering the torment of Hell in the life to come.

Property that belongs to orphans is fire, and guardians devour that fire in the same way as they eat their food. Their ultimate abode is also a blazing fire. It is a blazing fire both inside and out. The way the scene is portrayed shows the fire to be very real, as if its heat is being felt and as if it is seen to burn bellies and skins.

Such Qur'ānic statements are especially effective. They impart their powerful message to Muslims as also eradicate all traces of *ignorance* from their hearts. They replace such elements with a caution and fear of God. Thus, people are apprehensive lest they misplace any part of an orphan's wealth. They look at this wealth as though it is the fire that God describes in such very powerful verses. Hence they do not want to touch an orphan's property in any way. Such indeed was the attitude of the Prophet's Companions when they heard these verses.

It is authentically reported, on the authority of Ibn `Abbās, that when the verse which begins with *"those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, only swallow fire into their bellies"* was revealed, each one of the Prophet's Companions who had an orphan in his charge separated the property of that orphan from his own. They even separated their food and drink. If any part of an orphan's food was left over, it was kept for him until he ate it or it became unsuitable to eat. This inevitably caused great

difficulties. When these difficulties were pointed out to the Prophet, God revealed the verse that states: *"They ask you about orphans. Say: to improve their conditions is best. If you mix their affairs with yours, remember they are your brothers [in Islam]. God knows him who spoils things and him who improves. Had God so willed, He would indeed have overburdened you. Indeed, God is indeed Almighty, Wise."* (2: 220) After this verse was revealed, they mixed their food and drink together.

In this way, the Qur'ān elevates people's consciences to a sublime horizon, purifying them in the process of all traces of *ignorance* and its practices.

Islamic Inheritance Ensures Justice for All

> *God has this to enjoin on you with regard to your children: The male shall have a share equal to that of two females. If there are more than two women, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half of it. As for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having a child; but if he leaves no children, and his parents be his heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, his mother shall have one-sixth after (deducting) any bequest he may have made, or any outstanding debt. With regard to your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is of more benefit to you. This is, therefore, an ordinance from God. God is All-Knowing, Wise.* (Verse 11)

At this point, the *sūrah* explains the Islamic system of inheritance. It starts with an order, made in the form of a strong recommendation, made by God to parents, to maintain justice among their children. This order shows that God, limitless is He in His glory, is kinder, fairer and more merciful than parents are to their own children. It also shows that the whole system of inheritance has been laid down by God, who has given His verdict on every issue concerning parents and children, or that may come up among relatives. People have no choice but to receive their orders from Him and to implement His rulings. This is the proper concept of religion which the *sūrah, in* its entirety, seeks to explain in the clearest of terms.

The opening statement also lays down the general principle which pervades the whole system of Islamic inheritance: *"God has this to enjoin on you with regard to your children: The male shall have a share equal to that of two females."* (Verse 11) Details are then provided and shares assigned in the light of the aforementioned general principle. All these details are given in two verses; the first is devoted to inheritance by offspring and by parents from their children, while the second lists the inheritance of husbands and wives, and situations when the deceased has no surviving children or parents. A few other rules of inheritance are also explained in the last verse of this *sūrah.*

These three verses provide the foundation of the Islamic system of inheritance, which constitutes a branch of Islamic jurisprudence known as that of "decreed shares". Further elaboration is stated clearly in a number of *aĥādīth* or has been deduced by scholars on the basis of the principles provided in these verses. It is beyond the scope of this commentary to discuss such elaborate details, for they are more the concern of specialised works on Islamic jurisprudence. Therefore, we will limit ourselves here to an explanation of these verses and we will comment on the principles they provide within the perfect Islamic constitution.

"God has this to enjoin on you with regard to your children: The male shall have a share equal to that of two females." (Verse 11) This beginning to the system of inheritance points to the Originator of these rules and the basis upon which they are founded. It also stresses the fact that God is more merciful to mankind than parents are towards their children. When He assigns shares for them, He gives them better than what parents would normally give to their own children. Both notions are interrelated and mutually complementary. It is God who enjoins and decrees, and it is He who divides inheritance among people in the same way as He enjoins and commands in every respect and distributes everything that people receive in their lives. It is from God that regulations, legal provisions and laws originate, and from Him people learn how to conduct the most personal of their affairs, mainly the distribution of their estates among their children. This is the meaning of religion. People will not have a religion of any sort if they do not receive their instruction, on how to conduct all their life affairs, from God alone. They do not submit themselves totally to God if they receive instructions on any matter, great or small, from any other source. That would be to deny God's authority, and to drop back into *ignorance,* the state which Islam worked hard to uproot from human life altogether.

Moreover, what God enjoins and decrees concerning people's lives, including that which relates to the most private of their affairs, i.e. the sharing out of their wealth among their children, takes much better care of people, and is much more beneficial to them than what they may choose for themselves and their children. People, therefore, cannot say, "we will choose for ourselves," or "we know better what serves our interests best." Such statements are not only false, but they combine rudeness with insolence and make a claim of having better knowledge than God. Such a claim can only be made by one who is completely ignorant.

Al-`Awfī relates a statement on the authority of Ibn `Abbās in relation to the Qur'ānic statement: *"God has this to enjoin on you with regard to your children: The male shall have a share equal to that of two females."* (Verse 11) He says: "When the verses that include the decreed shares were revealed, giving details of what God has ordered of shares to be given to male and female offspring and to parents, some people were not happy with them. They said: 'A woman will be given one-quarter or one-eighth of

the whole estate, and a daughter may be given half of it, and a young boy receives a share when none of these can fight in battle or protect possessions. Keep quiet about this whole subject so that God's messenger (peace be upon him) may forget it, or we may talk to him and he may change these rules.' They spoke to him and said: `Messenger of God, a girl is supposed to receive of her father's estate when she neither rides a horse nor fights the enemy. A boy may receive the whole estate when he is of little value (in war).' It was their tradition in the days of *ignorance* not to give any share of inheritance except for those who fight and then they would give according to seniority of age." (Related by Ibn Abī Ĥātim and Ibn Jarīr.)

This was the logic of Arabian *ignorance,* which made some people uneasy about what God decreed, and His fair distribution of inheritance. Today's misguided logic which makes some people uneasy about the same subject may differ greatly or only a little from that same Arabian *ignorance.* This logic may pose the question: "How do we give wealth to children who have not worked for it and who have made no effort to earn it?" The two kinds of logic are the same. Neither of them appreciates the wisdom behind God's distribution, and neither shows the minimum degree of politeness that a person should maintain in an approach to God's legislation. Both combine ignorance with impudence.

"The male shall have a share equal to that of two females." (Verse 11) When a person leaves behind no heirs other than his own offspring, male and female, they take the whole of his estate, on the basis of one share for a girl and two shares for a boy.

There is no question here of favouring one sex over another. It is all a matter of maintaining balance and justice between the responsibilities of a male and those of a female within the family. In the Islamic social system, the husband is required to support his wife. He is further required to support all his children in all situations, whether he remains married to his wife or he divorces her. A woman, on the other hand, may be required to look after herself, or she may be looked after by a man both before and after her marriage. Under no circumstances is she required to maintain her husband or her children. This means that a man shoulders at least double the burden of a woman within the family and in the Islamic social system. This is how justice is maintained in this wise distribution which achieves perfect balance between rights and duties, claims and liabilities. All objections to this system of distribution betray ignorance on the one hand and impudence with God on the other. They serve no purpose other than to shake the foundations of the whole system, of family and society, to no avail whatsoever.

Inheritance of Parents and Children

The division begins with the shares of offspring when they inherit from their

parents: *"If there are more than two women, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half of it."* If the deceased has no male issue, but has two or more daughters, his daughters share equally two-thirds of his estate. If he leaves behind only one daughter, she inherits half of his estate. The remainder goes to his nearest of kin on his father's side, i.e. to his father, grandfather or brother, or to his half-brother on his father's side or to his paternal uncle or the children of his grandfather.

The Qur'ānic verse states: *"If there are more than two women, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind."* This statement apportions two-thirds if the deceased leaves behind more than two daughters. The same portion of two-thirds is given when the deceased has only two daughters on the basis of the *Sunnah* as well as the analogy with the share given to two sisters in the final verse of this *sūrah.* As for the *Sunnah, A*bū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah relate, on the authority of Jābir, that the widow of Sa`d ibn al-Rabī` came to the Prophet, saying: "Messenger of God, these are the two daughters of Sa`d whose father fell a martyr in the Battle of Uĥud in which he fought with you. Their uncle has taken their money and left them nothing. They cannot hope to get married unless they have money." The Prophet said: "God will give His judgement in this case." Then the verse that outlines shares of inheritance was revealed. The Prophet sent a message to their uncle, saying: "Give Sa`d's two daughters two-thirds and their mother one-eighth and you take the remainder." This, then, is the Prophet's judgement which gives two-thirds to two daughters. It shows that when the deceased leaves two or more daughters but no sons behind, his daughters share two-thirds of his property.

Another basis for this portion is the final verse in the *sūrah* which states the shares of two sisters: *"If there are two sisters, they shall both together have two-thirds of whatever he has left."* (Verse 176) It is only reasonable that two daughters have a stronger claim than two sisters to two-thirds of the deceased's inheritance. Moreover, in the case explained in the last verse of this *sūrah,* if there is only one sister, she inherits the same share as that given in the present verse to one daughter.

Having completed the offspring's shares, the verse goes on to explain the shares given to parents who survive any of their children, whether the deceased has children or not: "*As for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having a child; but if he leaves no children, and his parents be his heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, his mother shall have one-sixth."* (Verse 11)

There are, then, different cases and different ways of sharing a parent's bequest according to every particular situation. The first is when the deceased leaves behind children of his own in addition to his parents. Here, each of his parents inherits one-sixth and the remainder goes to his son, or to his son and daughter or daughters, on

the basis of a son having a share equal to that of two daughters. If the deceased has only one daughter, she inherits one-half of her father's estate, while each of his parents takes one-sixth and the father takes the last one-sixth on the basis of his being the nearest of kin to the deceased. In other words, the father has one portion as an ordained share and another portion for being the nearest of kin, taking what remains after those who are given appointed shares have taken theirs. If the deceased has two or more daughters, they take two-thirds and each of his parents one-sixth.

The second situation occurs when the deceased has neither children, brothers, sisters nor spouse. His parents, then, are his only heirs. In this case, his mother inherits one-third as her appointed share, and the remainder goes to his father as his nearest of kin. The father's share in this case is double that of the mother. If the deceased leaves a spouse in addition to his parents, the husband takes one-half in the case of the deceased being a woman, and the wife takes one-quarter if the deceased is a man. The mother takes one-third (and here there is a difference among scholars as to whether the mother's share is one-third of the whole estate or one-third of what is left after the deceased's wife or husband have taken their shares) and the father takes what is left after the mother has taken her share, provided that the father's share is not less than the mother's.

The third situation occurs when the deceased is survived by his parents and brothers, whether they are full or half brothers on either the father's or mother's side. They do not inherit any share themselves because their father takes precedence over them and he is the nearest of kin to the deceased after his own son. Brothers, however, reduce the mother's share by half, from one-third to one-sixth. The father takes the remainder if the deceased has no surviving spouse. If the deceased has only one brother as well as his parents, he does not reduce the mother's share. She receives one-third in the same way as if the deceased had neither children nor brothers.

All these shares, however, are only apportioned after execution of the deceased's will and payment of any outstanding debts: *"after (deducting) any bequest he may have made, or any outstanding debt".* (Verse 11) Ibn Kathīr, the famous Qur'ānic commentator, states: `All scholars, past and contemporary, are unanimous that the deduction of outstanding debts takes precedence over bequests by will." This is only reasonable because debt is a rightful claim of others. Hence, it must be deducted from the estate of the person who incurred the debt, since he has left enough money to do so. Such payment gives the lender his right and absolves the debtor of his debt. Islam has taken special care to impress on its followers the need to repay all debts. This ensures that people's lives can benefit from people's clear consciences and transactions can be made on the basis of trust and reassurance. It is for this reason that a debt is not written-off by reason of the borrower's death. It remains

outstanding. Abū Qatādah, a Companion of the Prophet, reports that a man asked the Prophet whether all his past mistakes and sins are written-off if he dies a martyr in the service of God's cause. The Prophet answered: "Yes. If you are killed fighting willingly, volunteering for God's cause, pushing forward, not withdrawing backward." The Prophet then asked him to repeat the question, which he did. The Prophet then said: "Yes, with the exception of your debts. Gabriel, the Angel, has told me that." (Related by Muslim, Mālik, and others.)

Abū Qatādah also reports that the body of a dead person was brought to the Mosque so that the Prophet may lead the Prayer for the deceased, i.e. *Janāzah* Prayer, for him. The Prophet said to his Companions: "You pray for your friend because he has an outstanding debt." I said: "I take over that debt, Messenger of God." The Prophet asked: "For full settlement?" I answered in the affirmative and the Prophet led the prayer for the deceased.

The will takes precedence over the apportioned shares of inheritance because it represents the deceased's desire. In fact, provision for making a will is made so that care can be taken of certain cases where some relatives supersede others preventing them from having a share of the inheritance. Those who are thus "screened", to use the Islamic term, may be poor and in need of help. Making a will in their favour is one way of helping them. There are other cases where the interests of the family are served through cementing relations between the heirs of the deceased and relatives who are not entitled to any share of the inheritance. Bequeathing some money to them by will is certain to remove all causes of envy, grudge and conflict before they can even take root. We have to remember here that no heir may be given by will anything over his apportioned share and that there is a ceiling for what any person may so bequeath. That ceiling is one-third of the whole estate. Limiting the will in this way guarantees against any prejudice to the rights of all heirs.

The verse concludes with a comment that makes three clear points: *"With regard to your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is of more benefit to you. This is, therefore, an ordinance from God. God is All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 11) The first seeks to help people accept these apportioned shares willingly. Some may be motivated by their parental instinct to favour their own children over their parents if division of their estate is left entirely to them. This is understandable because there is a natural weakness in favour of one's own children. Some people may be able to overcome this weakness if they have a particularly sensitive moral feeling towards their parents. Others vacillate between their natural weaknesses and their morality. It may happen that the social environment and traditions impose certain considerations similar to those that were voiced by some people when this inheritance legislation was first revealed. We have mentioned some of these earlier in the text. God, therefore, wants to give all people the reassurance generated by submission to His will and to His

legislation by reminding them that His knowledge is perfect and absolute, while people do not know who of their relatives is of more benefit to them and which method of sharing out inheritance may best serve their interests: *"With regard to your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is of more benefit to you."* (Verse 11)

The second point states the principles on which the whole system is based. It is not a question of favouring one person over another or serving a narrow interest. It is all a question of faith and Divine law: *"This is, therefore, an ordinance from God."* (Verse 11) It is He who has created parents and children and who has given them all their provisions and properties. It is God who makes the law and decrees the sharing out and promulgates legal provisions. People cannot legislate for themselves or impose their own dictates. After all, they do not know where their interests lie.

"God is All-Knowing, Wise." (Verse 11) This is the final point which impresses on all people that what God legislates for mankind is not merely something that they cannot contravene; it is also made to serve their interests on the basis of God's perfect knowledge and complete wisdom. People, on the other hand, have only scanty knowledge and follow their caprice.

These comments are made before the legislation of inheritance is completed so that the whole matter is put in its proper perspective of faith. A faith that defines religion as submission to God's law and as acceptance of His rulings.

Inheritance of Husbands, Wives, Brothers and Sisters

The *sūrah* goes on to define other apportioned shares: *"You shall inherit one-half of what your wives leave behind, provided that they have left no child; but if they have left a child, then you shall have one- quarter of what they leave behind, after [deducting] any bequest they may have made or any outstanding debt. And they (i.e. your widows) shall inherit one-quarter of what you leave behind, provided that you have left no child; but if you have left a child, then they shall have one- eighth of what you leave behind, after [deducting] any bequest you may have made or any outstanding debt."* (Verse 12)

These statements are clear and elaborate. A husband inherits half of his deceased wife's property if she leaves behind neither a son nor a daughter. If she has one or more sons or daughters, her husband inherits one-quarter of her property. The children of her sons, i.e. her grandchildren, reduce the husband's share from one-half to one-quarter in the same way as her own children. The same applies to her children from an earlier marriage who also reduce her husband's share to one- quarter. Her property is divided among her heirs after settling any outstanding debts or executing her will, as mentioned earlier.

A wife inherits one-quarter of the property left by her husband, if he dies without any progeny. If he has a child, a son or a daughter or even more, by her or by any other wife, or even grandchildren of his own, then their presence reduces her share to one-eighth. Again, settlement of debts and the execution of the will take precedence over any sharing out of the property.

The share given to a wife remains the same whether the deceased leaves behind one wife or two, three or four wives. All of them share equally in that portion of one-quarter or one-eighth, as the case may be.

The final rule in this second verse outlining the system of inheritance concerns a person who leaves no direct heirs: *"If a man or a woman has no heir in the direct line, but has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall inherit one-sixth; but if there be more, then they shall share in one- third, after [deducting] any bequest which may have been made or any outstanding debt, neither of which having been intended to harm [the heirs]. This is a commandment from God; and God is All-Knowing, Gracious."* (Verse 12) This is the case of a person having heirs whose relationship to him is weaker than that of either parents or children. Abū Bakr was asked to define the Arabic term *kalālah* that is used in the Qur'ān to refer to such a person. He said: "I can give only my own view. Hit is correct, then I am right only by God's grace. If it is mistaken, the mistake is mine and caused by Satan. God and His Messenger are not party to it. *Kalālah* is a person who has no children and no parents." When `Umar took over, he said in this respect: "I would be ashamed to contradict Abū Bakr in an opinion of his." In fact, the most eminent scholars among the Prophet's Companions and those of the next generations as well as the founders of all four major schools of thought and the overwhelming majority of scholars in successive generations, subscribe to this definition.

"If a man or a woman has no heir in the direct line, but has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall inherit one-sixth; but if there be more, then they shall share in one-third." (Verse 12) What is meant in this verse by the deceased having a brother or a sister is that either of them is only a half-brother or half-sister on his mother's side. If they are a full brother or full sister, or if they are a half-brother or half-sister on his father's side, they inherit according to the last verse in this *sūrah,* which gives them a portion in which a male takes twice as much as a female. The portion mentioned here of one-sixth for either of them, male or female, applies only to half-brothers and sisters on the side of the deceased's mother. They have an apportioned share that is specified in the Qur'ān. They do not inherit on the basis of being the nearest of kin. Had that been the case, they would have taken all the deceased's estate, or what is left of it, after those who have apportioned shares took theirs.

"But if there be more, then they shall share in one-third." (Verse 12) This applies regardless of their number or their sex. The weightier opinion is that they equally share their total portion of one-third, although some scholars maintain that the

division of the portion assigned must be on the basis of a male taking twice as much as a female. Equal division seems to be weightier in this case, because it is in line with the principle stated in the same verse, giving the male an equal share of the female: *"Each of them shall have one-sixth."* (Verse 12)

This means that half-brothers and sisters on the mother's side are different from other heirs on three counts:

1. The shares of males and females are equal among them.
2. They have no claim to any part of the inheritance unless the deceased has neither parents nor offspring. If his father, grandfather, child or grandchild survives him, they inherit nothing.
3. Their total share, regardless of their number, has a maximum of one-third of the estate.

"After [deducting) any bequest which may have been made or any outstanding debt, neither of which having been intended to harm [the heirs]." (Verse 12) This is a warning against making a will for the specific purpose of harming any of one's heirs. Thus, Islam ensures that a will is made to serve justice and the family's interests. It is worth mentioning again here that settling debts takes precedence over executing the will and both the debt and the will take precedence over any sharing out of the inheritance among heirs.

This second verse concludes with a comment that is similar to the first verse: *"This is a commandment from God; and God is All-Knowing, Gracious."* (Verse 12) Thus the import of this comment is emphasised that much more strongly. These apportioned shares are given as "a *commandment from God"*. They are not the result of any caprice, nor are they swayed by desire. They emanate from perfect knowledge. Hence, they must be obeyed because they are made by the One to whom the right to legislate and apportion belongs totally. They must be accepted because they come from the only Source with absolute and perfect knowledge.

When God's Laws Are Obeyed

> *These are the bounds set by God. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger, him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow, there to dwell forever. That is the supreme triumph. But whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, and transgresses His bounds, him will He commit to the fire, there to abide forever; and shameful torment awaits him.* (Verses 13-14)

These two verses serve as further emphasis to the basic rule of Islam that makes it

absolutely clear that the authority to legislate belongs to God alone. Any contravention of this rule constitutes disobedience to God and rejection of Islam altogether. This is re-emphasised in these two verses which describe the shares specified for the distribution of the estate of a deceased person among his or her heirs as bounds set by God. These verses serve as a clear definition of relations within the family and social and economic relations in the society at large. The rulings they give on how the estate of the deceased is to be shared out are final. When they are properly respected and God and His Messenger are obeyed in these legal provisions, the reward is great: it is nothing less than Paradise, forever, which is indeed a supreme triumph. When they are contravened by disobedience to God and His Messenger, the result is an everlasting fire and a shameful torment.

But why is such a great and final destiny dependent on obedience or disobedience in a legal provision that tackles an aspect of secondary importance like the provision of inheritance? This provision speaks only of small details and its reward may appear to be out of proportion with its nature.

Several verses in the *sūrah* clarify this matter and put it into proper perspective. These verses explain the meaning of religion, true faith and the limits of Islam. We will attempt, however, to give a brief clarification of this issue considering that the two verses we are discussing today, which come as a comment on the legislation of inheritance, are of vital importance.

The central question posed by Islam, and indeed by all Divine faith ever since God sent His first messenger to mankind, is: to whom does Godhead on earth belong? and to whom belongs the Lordship of mankind? The answer to both parts of this question makes all the difference not only with regard to faith but to human life altogether.

If the answer is that both Godhead and Lordship in the universe belong to God alone, without associating any partners with Him, then that is the essence of true faith and proper submission to God. That is the religion of Islam. If, on the other hand, the answer is that they belong to God's partners, with or without Him, then that is idolatry, or total rejection of faith.

When Godhead and Lordship in the universe belong to God alone, all creatures must submit to Him and obey all His commandments. This means that they must follow the system and the constitution He has chosen for them. He alone can make that choice and He alone can legislate for people, giving them the values, standards, and the social systems to establish and maintain. No one else, whether an individual or a group, can share that authority with Him except on the basis of His law and constitution. That authority is the total sum and the practical result of Godhead and Lordship. When it is given to someone else, then submission and obedience are

offered to beings other than God. The practical effect of that is the implementation of regulations, laws, values, and standards established by human beings without any reference to God's Book and authority. In such a situation, there can be no proper faith and no Islam. There can only be transgression and a total denial of the faith.

This is the true essence of the whole matter. In this light, transgression of the bounds set by God is the same whether it relates to one aspect of God's laws or to the whole of Islamic law. In both cases, the transgression represents a rebellion against faith. What makes all the difference is the basic rule that shapes human societies. That rule seeks a clear and definite answer to the question of whether Godhead and Lordship are given to God alone, or they are being usurped by people. In this context, verbal claims of adherence to Islam count for little unless they are given their proper practical effect.

This is the essential fact stressed in this comment which makes a link between the sharing out of inheritance, obedience to God and His Messenger and the ultimate reward of Paradise, the reward to be enjoyed forever. This principle is the subject matter of many verses in this *sūrah,* which throw ample light on it, in order to make it totally clear, and absolutely indisputable. Everyone who claims to be a Muslim must understand that basic fact so that he can determine whether he is truly a Muslim who lives his faith.

We still have to add a concluding word about the Islamic system of inheritance. It is a fair system that satisfies the needs of human nature and those of family life. This becomes most obviously apparent when we compare it with any system, old or new, known to man anywhere in the world.

This system takes fully into account the concept of mutual care and security within the family. It apportions shares according to the duty of each member of the family. When heirs of the first degree, such as parents and children, have taken their defined shares, the strongest claim to a portion of the deceased's inheritance belongs to his nearest relatives on his father's side. It is those relatives who are also required to take care of him and to contribute to the satisfaction of his liabilities in any emergency. When we consider this aspect, the system appears to be both balanced and perfect.

This system takes into account the fact that all mankind originated from a single soul. Hence, it does not deprive a woman or a child of their shares simply because of their sex or minority. It does not favour one sex over another, except in relation to their respective duties within the concept of mutual care within the family.

It also takes into account all aspects of human nature. It is for this reason that children are given priority in inheritance over all other relatives. The new generation represents human survival and continuation of the family. Hence it is more

deserving of care. The Islamic system, however, does not deprive parents or grandparents or other relations of their shares. Each has his or her portion.

Moreover, the Islamic system of inheritance is most suitable to human nature. It satisfies the natural desire of every human being to maintain his relations with his offspring in the sense that his children represent the continuity of his existence. It reassures a man who has exerted his efforts to save a portion of his earnings that his own children will not be deprived of the fruits of his efforts. They inherit him when he dies.

This motivates him to double his efforts which, in turn, benefits society as a whole, without prejudice to the concept of mutual social care and security on which Islam lays strong emphasis.

Finally, the Islamic system of inheritance ensures that wealth accumulated by every generation is divided and redistributed. This ensures that vast wealth does not remain in a few hands, as happens in systems that give all inheritance to the eldest son or appoint very few heirs. From this point of view, it is an effective tool for economic reorganisation within the community for it rids it of excesses without any direct intervention by the authorities. Such intervention is normally received with natural distaste. This continuing process of division and redistribution takes place without ill-feeling because it understands human motives and satisfies them. That is the basic difference between Divine and man-made legislation.

2
Perfect Social Morality

As for those of your women who are guilty of gross immoral conduct, call upon four from among you to bear witness against them. If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them or God opens another way for them. (15)

وَٱلَّٰتِي يَأۡتِينَ ٱلۡفَٰحِشَةَ مِن نِّسَآئِكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَشۡهِدُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ أَرۡبَعَةٗ مِّنكُمۡۖ فَإِن شَهِدُواْ فَأَمۡسِكُوهُنَّ فِي ٱلۡبُيُوتِ حَتَّىٰ يَتَوَفَّىٰهُنَّ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ أَوۡ يَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلٗا ١٥

And the two from among you who are guilty of the same, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, then leave them alone. God is the One who accepts repentance, the Merciful. (16)

وَٱلَّذَانِ يَأۡتِيَٰنِهَا مِنكُمۡ فَـَٔاذُوهُمَاۖ فَإِن تَابَا وَأَصۡلَحَا فَأَعۡرِضُواْ عَنۡهُمَآۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابٗا رَّحِيمًا ١٦

God will indeed accept the repentance of only those who do evil out of ignorance, and then repent shortly afterwards. It is they to whom God turns in His mercy. God is All-Knowing, Wise. (17)

إِنَّمَا ٱلتَّوۡبَةُ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٱلسُّوٓءَ بِجَهَٰلَةٖ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِن قَرِيبٖ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَتُوبُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ١٧

Repentance shall not be accepted from those who indulge in their evil deeds and, when death comes to any of them, he says: "I now repent"; nor from those who die as non-believers. For those We have prepared grievous suffering. (18)

وَلَيۡسَتِ ٱلتَّوۡبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبۡتُ ٱلۡـَٰٔنَ وَلَا ٱلَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمۡ كُفَّارٌۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَعۡتَدۡنَا لَهُمۡ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ١٨

Believers, it is unlawful for you to inherit women against their will, or to bar them from remarrying so that you may make off with part of what you have given them, except when they are guilty of a flagrant indecency. Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good. (19)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمۡ أَن تَرِثُواْ ٱلنِّسَآءَ كَرۡهٗاۖ وَلَا تَعۡضُلُوهُنَّ لِتَذۡهَبُواْ بِبَعۡضِ مَآ ءَاتَيۡتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّآ أَن يَأۡتِينَ بِفَٰحِشَةٖ مُّبَيِّنَةٖۚ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِۚ فَإِن كَرِهۡتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكۡرَهُواْ شَيۡـٔٗا وَيَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيۡرٗا كَثِيرٗا ١٩

If you wish to take one wife in place of another and you have given the first one a large sum of money, do not take away anything of it. Would you take it away though that constitutes a gross injustice and a manifest sin? (20)

وَإِنۡ أَرَدتُّمُ ٱسۡتِبۡدَالَ زَوۡجٖ مَّكَانَ زَوۡجٖ وَءَاتَيۡتُمۡ إِحۡدَىٰهُنَّ قِنطَارٗا فَلَا تَأۡخُذُواْ مِنۡهُ شَيۡـًٔاۚ أَتَأۡخُذُونَهُۥ بُهۡتَٰنٗا وَإِثۡمٗا مُّبِينٗا ٢٠

How can you take it away when each of you has been privy with the other, and they have received from you a most solemn pledge? (21)

وَكَيۡفَ تَأۡخُذُونَهُۥ وَقَدۡ أَفۡضَىٰ بَعۡضُكُمۡ إِلَىٰ بَعۡضٖ وَأَخَذۡنَ مِنكُم مِّيثَٰقًا غَلِيظٗا ٢١

Do not marry women whom your fathers have previously married, unless it be a thing of the past. Surely, that is an indecent, abominable and evil practice. (22)

وَلَا تَنكِحُواْ مَا نَكَحَ ءَابَآؤُكُم مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ إِلَّا مَا قَدۡ سَلَفَۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةٗ وَمَقۡتٗا وَسَآءَ سَبِيلًا ٢٢

Forbidden to you [in marriage] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your aunts paternal and maternal, your brother's daughters and your sister's daughters, your mothers who have given

حُرِّمَتۡ عَلَيۡكُمۡ أُمَّهَٰتُكُمۡ وَبَنَاتُكُمۡ وَأَخَوَٰتُكُمۡ وَعَمَّٰتُكُمۡ وَخَٰلَٰتُكُمۡ وَبَنَاتُ ٱلۡأَخِ وَبَنَاتُ ٱلۡأُخۡتِ وَأُمَّهَٰتُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِيٓ أَرۡضَعۡنَكُمۡ وَأَخَوَٰتُكُم مِّنَ ٱلرَّضَٰعَةِ وَأُمَّهَٰتُ نِسَآئِكُمۡ

suck to you, your suckling sisters, the mothers of your wives,

your stepdaughters — who are your foster children — born to your wives with whom you have consummated your marriage; but if you have not consummated your marriage with them, you will incur no sin [by marrying their daughters], and the wives of your own begotten sons; and [you are forbidden] to have two sisters as your wives at one and the same time, unless it be a thing of the past. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (23)

And [forbidden to you are] all married women, other than those whom your right hands possess. This is God's ordinance, binding upon you. Lawful to you are all women other than these, provided that, offering them of your own possessions, you seek to take them in wedlock, not in fornication. To those with whom you seek to enjoy marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them; but you will incur no sin if you agree among yourselves on any voluntary arrangement even after what has been stipulated by way of duty. God is indeed All- Knowing, Wise. (24)

Any of you who, owing to circumstances, is not in a position to marry a free believing woman may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess. God knows all about your faith: you belong to one another. Marry them, then, with their people's consent and give them their dowers in an equitable manner, as chaste women who give themselves in

وَرَبَٰٓئِبُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِي فِي حُجُورِكُم مِّن
نِّسَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِي دَخَلۡتُم بِهِنَّ فَإِن لَّمۡ
تَكُونُواْ دَخَلۡتُم بِهِنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَحَلَٰٓئِلُ أَبۡنَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِنۡ
أَصۡلَٰبِكُمۡ وَأَن تَجۡمَعُواْ بَيۡنَ
ٱلۡأُخۡتَيۡنِ إِلَّا مَا قَدۡ سَلَفَۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ
غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا ٢٣

۞ وَٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتُ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتۡ
أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡۖ كِتَٰبَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡۚ وَأُحِلَّ
لَكُم مَّا وَرَآءَ ذَٰلِكُمۡ أَن تَبۡتَغُواْ
بِأَمۡوَٰلِكُم مُّحۡصِنِينَ غَيۡرَ مُسَٰفِحِينَۚ
فَمَا ٱسۡتَمۡتَعۡتُم بِهِۦ مِنۡهُنَّ فَـَٔاتُوهُنَّ
أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةٗۚ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ
فِيمَا تَرَٰضَيۡتُم بِهِۦ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ٱلۡفَرِيضَةِۚ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ٢٤

وَمَن لَّمۡ يَسۡتَطِعۡ مِنكُمۡ طَوۡلًا أَن يَنكِحَ
ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ فَمِن مَّا مَلَكَتۡ
أَيۡمَٰنُكُم مِّن فَتَيَٰتِكُمُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِۚ وَٱللَّهُ
أَعۡلَمُ بِإِيمَٰنِكُمۚ بَعۡضُكُم مِّنۢ بَعۡضٖۚ
فَٱنكِحُوهُنَّ بِإِذۡنِ أَهۡلِهِنَّ وَءَاتُوهُنَّ
أُجُورَهُنَّ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ مُحۡصَنَٰتٍ غَيۡرَ

honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as women who have secret love companions.

مُسَٰفِحَٰتٖ وَلَا مُتَّخِذَٰتِ أَخۡدَانٖۚ

If after their marriage, they are guilty of gross immoral conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free women are liable. This provision applies to those of you who fear to stumble into sin. Yet it is better for you to be patient. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (25)

فَإِذَآ أُحۡصِنَّ فَإِنۡ أَتَيۡنَ بِفَٰحِشَةٖ
فَعَلَيۡهِنَّ نِصۡفُ مَا عَلَى ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ
مِنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنۡ خَشِيَ
ٱلۡعَنَتَ مِنكُمۡۚ وَأَن تَصۡبِرُواْ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۗ
وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٢٥

God wants to make all this clear to you and to guide you in the [righteous] ways of life of those who have preceded you, and to turn to you in His mercy. God is All-Knowing, Wise. (26)

يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمۡ وَيَهۡدِيَكُمۡ سُنَنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ وَيَتُوبَ عَلَيۡكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ
عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٞ ٢٦

And God wants to turn to you in His mercy, while those who follow their lusts want you to go very far astray. (27)

وَٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَن يَتُوبَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَيُرِيدُ
ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ أَن تَمِيلُواْ مَيۡلًا
عَظِيمٗا ٢٧

God wants to lighten your burdens; for man has been created weak. (28)

يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَن يُخَفِّفَ عَنكُمۡۚ وَخُلِقَ
ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ ضَعِيفٗا ٢٨

Overview

The first passage of this *sūrah* dealt with the organisation of Muslim society and the eradication of all traces of pagan beliefs from its system by providing guarantees to orphans and protecting their wealth within their families and within the community. It has also dealt with the system of inheritance. All these guarantees work within the Islamic system outlined by God, the Lord of all people. He has created them all of a single soul, and He has established human society with the family as its basic unit, making mutual care its guiding principle. Moreover, all their affairs must be regulated within the bounds set by God on the basis of His perfect knowledge and infinite wisdom. They receive their reward or suffer their

punishment according to whether they obey or disobey Him in all this.

In this second passage, the *sūrah* continues with its purpose of organising Muslim society, aiming at purifying it of all gross indecency. It provides for the isolation of those who commit such indecency, men and women, while at the same time opening the door for those of them who want to repent, purify themselves and lead a clean and chaste life. It also rescues women from what they used to suffer of humiliation and injustice under *ignorant* systems, so that the family could establish its firm and sound basis. That was the only way to build the society on firm foundations and within a clean atmosphere. It concludes with giving a list of the women whom a man is forbidden to marry under Islamic law. This constitutes a part of the organisation of family life.

First Step Towards Eradicating Immorality

> *As for those of your women who are guilty of gross immoral conduct, call upon four from among you to bear witness against them. If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them or God opens another way for them.* (Verse 15) *And the two from among you who are guilty of the same, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, then leave them alone. God is the One who accepts repentance, the Merciful.* (Verse 16)

Islam defines here its method, which aims at the cleansing and purification of society. In the first instance, it chooses to isolate those women who commit adultery from the rest of the community, once their guilt is proven. It also chooses to inflict physical punishment on those men who are sexually perverted, without specifying the type of punishment or its nature. At a later stage, Islam chose to mete out the same punishment to such men and women, which is flogging as explained in *Sūrah* 24, The Light, or *Al-Nūr,* and stoning to death as explained by the *Sunnah.* The ultimate aim of either punishment is to protect society and to guard its honour and morality.

In every situation and with every punishment, Islamic legislation provides guarantees which make it extremely difficult for injustice to take place and which make it almost impossible for punishment to be inflicted on the basis of suspicion or mistaken identity. This was especially important given that the punishment legislated could leave such a serious effect on people's lives: "*As for those of your women who are guilty of gross immoral conduct, call upon four from among you to bear witness against them. If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them or God opens another way for them.*" (Verse 15)

Great care is being taken here. Firstly, the women on whom this punishment may

be inflicted are defined as follows, *"As for those of your women"*, meaning Muslim women only. Furthermore, the men who are called in to testify to the occurrence of the offence are specified as follows, *"Call upon four from among you"*, meaning that they must also be Muslims. It is, then, a punishment for a certain kind of woman once the offence is proven by the testimony of certain men.

Islam does not allow non-Muslim men to testify against Muslim women, when they commit indecency. The four male witnesses must belong to the Islamic faith and the Muslim community, submit to its legislation, accept its leadership, care for its welfare and know what takes place within it. When it comes to the honour of a Muslim woman, the testimony of a non-Muslim is unacceptable, because we cannot be certain of his honesty and integrity. He has no interest in safeguarding the cleanliness and chastity of the community and he is not particularly interested in maintaining justice in that community. These safeguards have remained in effect even after the ruling in such cases was changed and the punishment for adultery was more clearly defined as flogging or stoning.

"If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses." (Verse 15) Thus they do not mix with or contaminate the Muslim society, nor are they allowed to marry or undertake any activity. This punishment continues *"until death takes* them" while they are confined in their houses, *"or God opens another way for them"*. This means that they themselves may change, or that their punishment may be changed. It also means that God may decide to do whatever He will with them. All this suggests that this is not a final ruling, but an interim verdict that takes into account certain circumstances in society. A different verdict which would be more permanent was, then, to be expected. This took place when the verdict and the punishment were changed to those outlined in *Sūrah* 24 and in the *Sunnah.* The strict guarantees which are provided here for the establishment of guilt have, however, remained the same.

Imām Aĥmad relates on the authority of `Ubādah ibn al-Şāmit that the Prophet used to be visibly affected every time revelations were bestowed on him from on high. His face changed and he looked ill at ease. One day, after he received revelations and he regained his colour, he said: "Learn this from me. God has opened another way for them, both in the case of a married man and a married woman and that of an unmarried man with an unmarried woman. For the married, one hundred lashes and stoning, and for the unmarried one hundred lashes and exile for a year." This *ĥadīth* is also related by Imām Muslim and others but using different wording: "Learn this from me; learn this from me. God has opened another way for them: For an unmarried man with an unmarried woman, one hundred lashes and exile for a year; and for a married man with a married woman, one hundred lashes and stoning." The practice of the Prophet confirms this in the case of Mā`iz and the Ghāmidī woman. It is stated in the authentic compilation of *ĥadīth* by Muslim that

the Prophet stoned them to death, and did not inflict on them the lesser punishment of flogging. The same occurred when the case of two Jewish adulterers was put to him for judgement. His verdict was stoning to death and not flogging. The Prophet's practice, then, shows that this is the final and permanent verdict.

The next verse also prescribes an interim measure: *"And the two from among you who are guilty of the same, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, then leave them alone. God is the One who accepts repentance, the Merciful."* (Verse 16) It seems clear that the reference in the expression to *"the two from among you who are guilty"* of gross immoral conduct refers to two homosexual men. A number of scholars say that the punishment meant in the words *`punish them both" is* in the form of verbal rebuke and beating them with shoes.

"If they repent and mend their ways, then leave them alone." Repentance and mending one's ways indicate a fundamental change in character, method, action and behaviour. With this change, punishment should stop and the community should cease to inflict any harm on repenting homosexuals. In this context, leaving them alone means to cease punishing them.

This is followed by a profound concluding remark: *"God is the One who accepts repentance, the Merciful."* (Verse 16) It is He who has ordered punishment, and it is He who orders that it must stop when the offender repents and mends his ways. People have no say in either the infliction of punishment or in its suspension. They only implement God's laws and directives. He accepts repentance and turns in mercy to reformed offenders.

Another fine touch contained within this comment directs people to make mercy and compassion the basis of their dealings with one another. God accepts repentance and His grace is limitless. People, then, should be more tolerant of one another, overlook past mistakes and offences when they are followed by true repentance. This is not complacency in disguise. There is no mercy to hardened sinners. This is compassion extended only to repenters who want to reform themselves. They are accepted within the community. No one reminds or reproaches them again of their past offences, since they have mended their ways. The community is required to help them start a new, clean and pure life. It is also required to forget their past offences so that no ill-feeling is aroused which may tempt the repenting sinners to go back to their erring ways. Such a return will inevitably ensure their ruin in this life and in the life to come. Moreover, they will harbour grudges against the society as a whole.

This punishment, however, was later amended. In this respect, the Prophet is quoted as saying: "If you see anyone doing what the people of Lot used to do, kill both partners."

A Perfectly Moral Society

These rulings show very clearly that Islam was intent, from its very early days, to eradicate immorality from Muslim society. It did not wait until it established its state in Madinah before it promulgated laws to be implemented by the ruling authority. Instead, the prohibition of adultery was stated in *Sūrah 17,* The Night Journey, or *Al-Isrā',* which was revealed in Makkah: *"Do not come near to adultery: for it is an abomination and an evil way.''* (17: 32) Again, in *Sūrah* 23, The Believers, or *Al-Mu'minūn,* successful believers are described as people *"who are mindful of their chastity, [not seeking to satisfy their desires] except with their wives".* (23: 4-5) The same description is repeated in *Sūrah* 70, The Ascending Stairways, or *Al-Ma`ārij.*

All these *sūrahs* were revealed in Makkah when Islam enjoyed neither a state nor authority. Hence, no specific punishments were given for this offence, although its prohibition was established in Makkah. Only when a state that exercised power was established in Madinah, were punishments defined. Verbal directives and instructions were no longer sufficient to put an end to such crimes and protect society. Islam is a practical religion that appreciates that the power of the state is needed for the implementation of laws. According to Islam, religion is the system by which to regulate people's practical life. It is not mere feelings and abstract values.

From the outset of the Islamic faith being accepted by some people in Makkah, it started to purify them. When Islam established its state in Madinah, which was backed by an authority able to implement a well defined legal code and able to shape the Islamic way of life in a practical form, it began to take practical steps to safeguard society against immoral conduct, adding to its directives the force of proper punishment. As we have already said, Islam is not merely general principles and abstract values. It adds to these a real authority to implement the principles in practice. Its structure cannot stand on one leg.

This applies to all Divine religions, even though some people wrongly claim that there were Divine religions that did not enjoin any law, system or governing authority. Every religion is a way of life, which is practical and down to earth. People submit themselves to God alone and receive their concept of faith, moral values, and practical legislation from Him only. Such legislation must be implemented by a government that can enforce such rules and punish those who violate them, and also protect society from any encroachment by the evils of *ignorance.* Thus, all submission is dedicated to God alone. This means that there are no deities, in any shape or form, who have the authority to legislate and establish values, standards, laws or regulations. The right to do all this belongs to God alone. Any creature that claims such a right is, in effect, claiming Godhead for himself. No religion revealed by God allows any man to be god or suffers him to make such a claim and put it into effect.

Hence, no Divine religion would limit itself to mere beliefs without supporting them by a law and a governing authority.

In Madinah, then, Islam started to make its real presence felt by purifying the society through legislation which was put into practice. It defined punishment for offences, as we have seen in the rulings included in this *sūrah.* Some of these were later amended to take their final forms as determined by God.

The Surest Way to Human Destruction

It should not come as a surprise to us that Islam takes a very serious view of immorality and works hard for its total eradication. The most important feature *of Jāhili* (ignorant) societies throughout all ages, as we see today across the globe, is permissiveness and the shedding of all moral and legal inhibitions. Thus, promiscuity becomes an aspect of personal freedom that is only opposed by intolerant prudes. People living in ignorant societies may agree to forgo, willingly or unwillingly, all their human freedom but not their "animal" freedom. They will also rise up in arms against anyone who opposes promiscuity and tries to regulate their moral standards.

In *ignorant* societies, all systems collaborate to destroy moral barriers, weaken natural controls within man, give an innocent appearance to permissiveness and allow excessive promiscuity to run without checks or controls. This inevitably leads to the weakening of family and social controls, to the ridicule of natural, healthy feelings which are disgusted by permissiveness, and to the glorification of both physical and emotional nudity and all its methods of expression.

Islam tries to purify human feelings and societies from all these characteristics of promiscuous *ignorance.* You have only to read the poetry of Imru'l-Qais, the renowned poet of pre-Islamic Arabia, to find close similarities with the poetry of ancient Greece and that of the Roman Empire. You will also find close similarities with the arts and literature of contemporary *Jāhiliyyah* (or state of ignorance), Arabian and non-Arabian. Moreover, if we examine social traditions, the status of women and permissiveness in all *Jāhiliyyah* societies, ancient and contemporary, we are bound to conclude that they all start from the same concept and adopt similar slogans.

Such permissiveness always leads to the destruction of civilisation and the collapse of the nation in which it spreads. This is exactly what happened to the ancient Greek, Roman and Persian civilisations. It is also happening today to European and American civilisations, which have started their decline despite all the appearances of great advances in the industrial field. This is something that has been worrying men of wisdom in the West, although they feel that they are too weak to be able to check this destructive trend. The total destruction of society and civilisation is

the inevitable end, yet the people of *Jāhiliyyah,* in all ages and societies, push forward towards permissiveness at full speed. Indeed, they are willing to sacrifice all their freedoms, and live the life of slaves, provided that they have the freedom to enjoy their animal indulgences.

This is indeed neither indulgence nor freedom. It is total enslavement to carnal desires, which makes man sink far below the standards of animals. Animals follow the dictates of their nature in this connection. They have special seasons when they become sexually active. Moreover, their sexual function is strictly linked to the purpose of procreation. A female does not accept the male except in her season of fertility. The male, on the other hand, does not make any advance towards the female except when she is ready. But God has left man to his own reason and made faith the power to control that reason. If he breaks loose from faith, he will find himself weak, subjected to much pressure. He cannot check and control his desire. It is impossible, therefore, to provide any real social checks and to make society truly clean except through faith. Yet faith needs to be backed by an organised authority to punish those who violate the bounds set by God. In this way, faith saves man from the depths of animal desire and elevates him to a position of honour among the rest of His creation.

Humanity today lives a life that gives faith a very secondary position. It does not have the benefit of a ruling body that derives its authority from faith. Hence, wise individuals in Western societies call in vain for the establishment of checks and controls. They may well save themselves the trouble because no one responds to mere words that are not backed by an executive authority and deterrent punishments. The church and the clergy also make their contribution against promiscuity, but it all goes in vain. No one responds to a lost faith lacking the authority to undertake the implementation of its laws and directives. Thus, mankind moves headlong towards the abyss without any hope of salvation.

That this civilisation will ultimately be destroyed is absolutely certain, as is evident by all past human experience. This is true despite the apparent strength of this civilisation and its great foundation. Man is indeed the greatest of all these foundations. When man is destroyed, civilisation cannot remain in existence, supported only by factories and newly-implemented robotic production.

If we fully appreciated how profound this truth is, we would be able to recognise the greatness of Islam. For it has legislated its severe punishment for promiscuity and gross indecency in order to protect man from his own destruction. This is the only way for human life to be established on proper human foundations. We would also recognise the extent of the crime committed by those systems which collaborate to destroy the foundation of human life through the glorification of promiscuity and permissiveness, giving them such appealing names as "art", "freedom" and

"progress". Every means that contributes to the destruction of man is a crime and it must be called as such. Moreover, it must be countered with sound advice as well as stern punishment. This is what Islam does because it is a religion with a perfect system.

Essence of True Repentance

> *God will indeed accept the repentance of only those who do evil out of ignorance, and then repent shortly afterwards. It is they to whom God turns in His mercy. God is All-Knowing, Wise. Repentance shall not be accepted from those who indulge in their evil deeds and, when death comes to any of them, he says: "I now repent"; nor from those who die as non-believers. For those We have prepared grievous suffering.* (Verses 17-18)

While Islam prescribes punishment, it does not slam the door in the face of sinners, should they want to return to society after having realised their guilt. Indeed, Islam encourages them and opens the way for them to repent and purify themselves. The encouragement is so emphatic that God makes acceptance of repentance, once it is genuine and sincere, a duty which He in His glory imposes on Himself by His Own free will. In this, His grace is more than anyone can expect.

We have spoken about repentance and its acceptance in the past, when we commented on the verse which describes the true believers as those who *"when they commit a gross indecency or wrong themselves, remember God and pray for the forgiveness of their sins"*. (3: 135) All that we have stated on that occasion is relevant here. Repentance is mentioned here, however, for a different purpose, and by which it seeks to explain its true essence.

True repentance which God, out of His Grace, has bound Himself to accept is the one which is deeply felt by the repenter and which indicates that he or she has undergone a total transformation. It means that past mistakes are sincerely regretted, and that regret has prompted a total change of attitude when the person concerned still enjoys good health, and still aspires to a brighter future. Such repentance is normally accompanied by a genuine desire for self-purification and a resolve to follow a different way of life.

"God will indeed accept the repentance of only those who do evil out of ignorance, and then repent shortly afterwards. It is they to whom God turns in His mercy. God is All-Knowing, Wise." (Verse 17) What is meant by *"those who do evil out of ignorance"* is anyone who commits sin. Scholars are almost unanimous that "ignorance", as it is used here, means deviation from Divine guidance, whether for a long or short period, as long as it does not continue until one is in the throes of death. Repenting *"shortly afterwards"*

refers to repentance in good time, before death overtakes one and one's life is felt to have reached its end. Such repentance reveals genuine regret and strong resolve to mend one's ways. It indicates that one's conscience is back at work. Hence, it is to those people that *"God turns in His mercy."* For *"God is All-Knowing, Wise."* Any action of His is based on His knowledge and wisdom and gives His servants the chance to return to the ranks of those who are good. He never chases them out when they have a genuine desire to seek refuge with Him and receive His mercy. We have to remember that God — limitless is He in His glory — has no need for His servants or their repentance. When they repent, they benefit only themselves. It is their lives and the life of the community in which they live that improve and become happy. Hence, the way is open for them to return to the true path at any time.

> *Repentance shall not be accepted from those who indulge in their evil deeds and, when death comes to any of them, he says: "I now repent"; nor from those who die as non-believers. For those We have prepared grievous suffering.* (Verse 18)

This sort of repentance is that of one who is cornered. During his lifetime, he indulged in sin up to his ears. Now that death is overtaking him, he can no longer commit any more sins, for he has no time to do so. Hence, God rejects such repentance because it does not improve one's heart or reform one's style of life. Nor does it indicate any change in one's erring ways. Genuine repentance is accepted because it is the door that is open for erring people to return to the camp of the good, thus regaining themselves from error. In fact, humanity regains them after they have been among those who have been lost to evil and Satan. They will be able, if they remain alive for sometime after their repentance, to do well. If, on the other hand, they are overtaken by death shortly afterwards, they have at least declared their triumph over error.

"Nor from those who die as non-believers." (Verse 18) Those have severed all that could enable them to turn to God in sincere repentance and gain His forgiveness. *"For those We have prepared grievous suffering."* (Verse 18) It is waiting for them, ready to engulf them as just punishment.

The Divine constitution then prescribes severe punishments but it keeps the door open at all times for repentance. This gives it a unique balance, helping it to influence human life as no other constitution, ancient or modern, can ever do.

A New Way to Treat Women

The next theme in this passage is women. Women were treated very badly in pre-Islamic Arabia, as they were treated badly in all surrounding *ignorant* societies. Nowhere in that area were human rights extended to women. Indeed, women were

given a position much inferior to that of men so much so that they were more akin to inanimate objects. They were, at the same time, used for entertainment and pleasure, treated as sexual objects in order to satisfy carnal desires. Moreover, women were used as subject matter for pornographic arts and literature. Islam came to purify women of all that filth, giving them back their natural position in order to play their role in the family and in human society. The position Islam gives to women is that which accords with the general principle stated at the outset of this *sūrah: "Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women."* (Verse 1) Islam also sought to raise the standard of feelings in marital relationships from the low animal level to their highest human level. It adds to them overtones of mutual respect, affection and care, and places them on a much more solid foundation so that they can withstand shocks and outbursts of temper.

> *Believers, it is unlawful for you to inherit women against their will, or to bar them from remarrying so that you may make off with part of what you have given them, except when they are guilty of a flagrant indecency. Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good.* (Verse 19)

This verse outlaws inheriting women altogether. Before Islam rescued the Arabs from the depths of ignorance into which they had sunk, some Arab clans used to consider that the relatives of a deceased man had an overriding claim to his widow. They inherited her like they inherited his animals and property. Anyone of them could marry her if he so wanted. On the other hand, they could marry her to someone else and take her dowry for themselves. In other words, she was no more than an animal that could be sold at will. On the other hand, they could bar her from marrying anyone, leaving her at home until she bought her freedom from them.

Another tradition practised in Arabia, was one whereby if a woman became a widow, a relative of her deceased husband could throw his garment over her. This gesture was sufficient to assert his claim over her. It signified that she was now his, in the same way as if he had looted something. If she was pretty, he might marry her. If she was ugly, he might confine her to his house until she died when he would inherit her, or else, she would buy her freedom by giving him money. If, on the other hand, she was quick to flee from her husband's home, reaching her own family's home before he could throw his garment over her, she was safe and free.

Some Arabs used to divorce women and stipulate that they could not marry anyone without the consent of their former husbands. The only way for a woman in such a position to regain her freedom was to refund her former husband part or all of the dowry she received from him when they were first married.

In other Arabian tribes, a widow was kept without marriage until a young boy became old enough to marry her. If one of them had an orphan girl under his charge, he would bar her from marriage until his young son grew up, when he would marry her, taking all her money.

There were many other similar practices that conflicted with the honourable view with which Islam looked at women, stating that both man and woman were two parts of a single soul. These practices degraded both women and men alike. For it transformed the relationship between the two sexes into a mercenary one.

It is from that low position that Islam raised the relationship between man and woman to such a high, honourable level befitting the dignity of man, whom God has honoured and placed higher than all His creatures. It is indeed the Islamic concept of man and human life that made the elevation of relations between men and women possible.

Islam outlawed any possibility of a woman being treated as part of a deceased man's inheritance, like an animal or inanimate object. It also forbade the imposition of shackles and constraints on women that caused them harm, except in the case of their being manifestly guilty of gross immoral conduct. That, however, applied before the later punishment for adultery was prescribed. Moreover, Islam makes women free to choose their husbands. That freedom is enjoyed by every woman, virgin, widow or divorced. Moreover, kind treatment, which is expressed in the Qur'ān as *"consorting with them in a goodly manner,"* is a duty which applies to all, even when a man dislikes his wife. In this context, Islam raises the hope of what may come in the future, which is known only to God. This serves as a restraining factor, which makes man hesitate before severing a marital relationship in response to his initial feelings. It may be true that he is averse to his wife but it is also equally true that there is a great deal of good by which he may benefit if he restrains his feelings and continues to live with his wife: *"Believers, it is unlawful for you to inherit women against their will, or to bar them from remarrying so that you may make off with part of what you have given them, except when they are guilty of a flagrant indecency. Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good."* (Verse 19) The last part of this verse helps people to turn to God in hope. It restrains feelings of hatred until man has thought coolly about his situation. Thus, marital relationships are no longer like straw blown with the wind. Rather, they derive their strength from the permanent and strongest of all relationships, namely, the relationship between a believer and his Lord.

This Qur'ānic statement is indicative of the Islamic view of family relationships. Islam views the family's home as a place of peace, where every member of the family feels secure. The marital relationship from the Islamic standpoint, is a relationship

based on affection and compassion. It must, therefore, come into existence on the basis of free choice, so that it spreads an atmosphere into which mutual feelings of love, sympathy and compassion can prosper. Bearing this in mind, it is most befitting that Islam should say to husbands that even if they should dislike their wives, it may well be that the very wives they dislike are of much good to them. The marriage bond is something to be treasured, not to be severed in response to a passing whim. Marriage is a human institution of great importance. It must be viewed seriously. Its continued existence must not be subject to outbursts of temper or sudden changes of superficial sentiment.

A good, practical example of the seriousness with which Islam views marriage is provided by `Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Caliph, who was once approached by a man expressing his resolve to divorce his wife, simply because "he did not like her". `Umar said to him: "Are families built only on love? Where would you, then, place loyalty and mutual care?"

Compared with this, what some people say about "love", when they actually refer to momentary whims and changeable feelings, sounds cheap and stupid. The worst part of it is that such love is glorified to the extent that its absence is considered to be enough justification for divorce. They even advocate what is worse than that, namely, infidelity. Such people justify adultery simply because a woman does not love her husband, or a man does not love his wife. Such petty-minded people have no consideration beyond momentary physical attraction. Their thoughts cannot turn to such ideals as loyalty, mutual care, fulfilment of one's duty and responsibility towards one's family. Moreover, their petty ideas keep them away from faith. They cannot appreciate what God says to his believing servants: *"Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good."* (Verse 19)

It is only faith that elevates people and their concerns. It puts human life on a level far above wealth and carnal desires.

Marriage Conditions to Be Always Respected

> *If you wish to take one wife in place of another and you have given the first one a large sum of money, do not take away anything of it. Would you take it away though that constitutes a gross injustice and a manifest sin? How can you take it away when each of you has been privy with the other, and they have received from you a most solemn pledge? Do not marry women whom your fathers have previously married, unless it be a thing of the past. Surely, that is an indecent, abominable and evil practice. (Verses 20- 22)*

When such human ideals are put into practice, and it is found, nevertheless, that life in the family home has become intolerable and that it may be better for both the man and his wife to separate, then a divorced woman takes all her dowry and whatever she has inherited. The husband cannot take away any part of it, plentiful as it may be. To take away any part of it is evidently sinful: *"If you wish to take one wife in place of another and you have given the first one a large sum of money, do not take away anything of it. Would you take it away though that constitutes a gross injustice and a manifest sin?"* (Verse 20)

This is followed by a fine touch inspired by the close intimacy which exists in family life: *"How can you take it away when each of you has been privy with the other, and they have received from you a most solemn pledge?"* (Verse 21) The Arabic expression used here and which we have rendered as *"being privy with the other" has* much wider and finer connotations. It is by no means limited to physical intimacy. It does not merely mean that a couple have given themselves to one another. It includes feelings, responses and the sharing of secrets, problems and concerns. When we reflect on this verse, numerous images of married life come to mind, depicting what happens between a man and his wife at every moment of the night and day. Past memories are recalled. They have been privy with one another in their expressions of love, in their happy moments, in what they had shared of hopes and problems, in their aspirations for a happier present and a brighter future, in their shared thoughts about their children.

Compared with all these associations and memories which are recalled by the expression *"when each of you has been privy with the other,"* the importance of physical love seems too small. Hence, the divorcing husband would be too shy to ask for a refund of part of the dowry he gave to his wife.

Another factor is introduced by the last part of this verse: *"And they have received from you it most solemn pledge"* (Verse 21) That pledge is the pledge of marriage. Marriage which is given in the name of God and according to the method He has made lawful. It is a very solemn pledge that must be respected and cherished by every believer. Hence, the Qur'ān calls on believers to respect it.

The next verse forbids, most emphatically, a man's marriage with a woman whom his father had married before him. Such a practice was allowed in pre-Islamic Arabia. Moreover, it was one reason for barring women from marriage. If a man died, leaving behind a young son, the family could bar the young boy's stepmother from marriage until he, himself, was old enough to marry her. Alternatively, if the son was old enough to marry, he could inherit his stepmother. Islam forbids all this most emphatically: *"Do not marry women whom your fathers have previously married, unless it be a thing of the past. Surely, that is an indecent, abominable and evil practice."* (Verse 22)

Three easily identifiable considerations lie behind this prohibition. We, as human beings do not pretend to know every reason for Divine legislation. Nor do we make it a condition of obeying God's legislation that we should know the wisdom behind it. It is sufficient that God has decreed something for us to obey and implement it. We are certain that it serves our interests and that Divine wisdom is behind it.

The first consideration is that a father's wife is in the same position as a mother. Secondly, when a son marries a former wife of his father, he subconsciously feels himself to be his equal. Many people come to hate the former husbands of their wives. If a son is allowed to marry his father's former wife, he may come to hate his father instead of loving him. Thirdly, there must never be any suspicion of inheriting one's father's wife, in the same way as it was practised in pre-Islamic days. As we have already said, such inheritance is an insult to the humanity of both man and woman. They have been created from a single soul, and their dignity and honour are the same.

For these reasons, and others as well, such action is considered to be very hateful. It is described as indecent, abominable, i.e. generating hatred, and evil. Exemption is only made in the case of marriages contracted before Islam. These have been left for God's decision.

Women Whom We Are Forbidden to Marry

> *Forbidden to you [in marriage] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your aunts paternal and maternal, your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters, your mothers who have given suck to you, your suckling sisters, the mothers of your wives, your stepdaughters — who are your foster children — born to your wives with whom you have consummated your marriage; but if you have not consummated your marriage with them, you will incur no sin [by marrying their daughters], and the wives of your own begotten sons; and [you are forbidden] to have two sisters as your wives at one and the same time, unless it be a thing of the past. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.* (Verse 23)

Now the *sūrah* mentions in detail the classes of women whom we may not marry. This is one of the measures designed to organise the family and society as a whole.

All societies, primitive and sophisticated, ban marriage with certain women. Different nations have different reasons for such prohibitions and different classes of women whom a man cannot marry. Primitive societies normally have a wide area of prohibition, while civilised societies narrow that area considerably.

In Islam, women who are unlawful for marriage are mentioned in three verses: this one, the verse preceding it and the one following it. The prohibition in some

cases is total and permanent, while in others it is temporary. There are three reasons behind prohibition of marriage with certain women, namely, lineage, suckling and relation through a previous marriage. Islam did, however, abrogate all other restrictions known in other human societies, such as those based on differences of race, colour and nationality, and those based on social class and position within the same race and the same nation.

Those whom a man is forbidden to marry because of lineage are divided into four groups:

Firstly, his parents and grandparents. A man is forbidden to marry his mother, his grandmothers, paternal or maternal, no matter how high their degree is. All these come under the statement: "*Forbidden to you [in marriage] are your mothers.*"

Secondly, his own issue of any degree. A man is forbidden to marry his daughter or the daughters of his children, of whichever degree they may be. This is included under *"your daughters."*

Thirdly, the issue of his parents of any degree. A man is forbidden to marry his sister or the daughters of his own brothers and sisters, and the daughters of his nephews and nieces. All these are included under *"your sisters... your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters."*

Fourthly, the immediate issue of his grandparents. A man is forbidden to marry his paternal or maternal aunt, his father's aunt or the aunt of his maternal or paternal grandfather, his mother's aunt or the aunt of his paternal or maternal grandmother. All these come under "*your aunts, paternal and maternal.*" Those who issue indirectly from grandparents, i.e. cousins, whether on the father's side or the mother's side, are permissible marriage partners.

Women forbidden in marriage through other marital relationships fall into five categories:

1. The parents of one's wife, regardless of their degree. It is forbidden for a man to marry the mother of his wife or her grandmothers, maternal or paternal, no matter how high their degree is. This prohibition comes into effect once his marriage contract to his wife is made, whether the marriage is later consummated or not. This prohibition comes under the reference to *"the mothers of your wives."*
2. The issue of one's wife, regardless of their degree. A man is forbidden to marry the daughter of his wife, or the daughters of her sons or daughters, of any degree whatsoever. This prohibition, however, does not come into effect unless his marriage to his wife is consummated: *"your stepdaughters – who are your foster children – born to your wives with whom you have consummated your*

marriage; but if you have not consummated your marriage with them, you will incur no sin [by marrying their daughters]." (Verse 23)

3. The former wives of one's father or grandfathers of either side. A man is thus forbidden to marry his stepmother or the former wife of any of his grandfathers, of whichever degree they may be, whether on his father's side or his mother's side. This prohibition is stated in the verse preceding our present passage, which states: *"Do not marry women whom your fathers have previously married, unless it be a thing of the past."* (Verse 22) In pre-Islamic days, the ignorant Arabians permitted such marriages.
4. Wives of one's own children, or their children. Thus, a man is forbidden to marry the wife of his own begotten son, or the wife of his grandson or great grandson, of any degree. This prohibition comes under the reference to *"the wives of your own begotten sons."* This prohibition abrogates the tradition of pre-Islamic Arabian society, which forbade marriage with the former wife of one's adopted son. This prohibition is hereby restricted to the wife of one's own son. Furthermore, adoption was stopped by Islam, which demands that all children be called after their own fathers.
5. The sisters of one's wife. The prohibition in this case is conditional on the wife being alive and the man remaining married to her. In other words, it is forbidden to marry two sisters at one and the same time: *"[You are forbidden] to have two sisters as your wives at one and the same time, unless it be a thing of the past."* (Verse 23) Again, this sort of marriage was permitted in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The third cause of marriage prohibition is suckling. This includes all those categories one is forbidden to marry through lineage and marital relationships. Hence, the women that men are forbidden to marry through suckling include nine groups:

1. One's suckling mother and her mother and grandmothers, of any grade. This comes under *"your mothers who have given suck to you"*.
2. Daughters through suckling and their daughters and granddaughters, regardless of their grade. (A man's daughter through suckling is a girl who was breast-fed by his wife when she was married to him.)
3. Sisters through suckling and their daughters and granddaughters of any grade. This prohibition comes under *"your suckling sisters"*
4. Paternal and maternal aunts through suckling. (A maternal suckling aunt is the sister of one's suckling mother and a paternal aunt through suckling is the sister of that suckling mother's husband.)

5. One's wife's suckling mother, i.e. the woman who breast-fed one's wife when she was a child. The same applies to the mother and grandmothers of that woman, of any degree. Here, the same conditions as in prohibition through lineage apply, which means that the prohibition comes into effect the moment the marriage contract is made.
6. One's wife's suckling daughter, i.e. a girl who was breast-fed by one's wife before she was married to him, and her granddaughters of any degree. This prohibition, however, does not come into effect until one's marriage with one's wife has been consummated.
7. The former wife of one's father or grandfather, of any degree, through suckling. One's father through suckling is the man who is married to one's suckling mother. In other words, it is not only forbidden for a person who was breast-fed in his childhood by a woman other than his mother to marry that woman who is his suckling mother, it is also forbidden for him to marry any woman who his suckling father married.
8. The wife of one's son or grandson, of whatever degree, through suckling.
9. To be married at one and the same time to one woman and her sister, or paternal or maternal aunt through suckling or indeed any other woman whose relationship to her through suckling is equivalent to a prohibiting relationship through lineage.

The prohibition of the first and third of these groups is mentioned specifically in this Qur'ānic verse. The prohibition of all the other groups is based on the *ĥadīth* in which the Prophet is quoted as saying: "Forbidden through suckling are all women whose relationships are equivalent to the blood relationships causing marriage prohibition." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

These are the women who are specified as unlawful for us to marry. The Qur'ānic text does not mention any reason, general or specific for this prohibition. This means that whatever the reasons given by scholars or other people are based on personal judgement and opinion. There may be a reason that is common to all these groups of women. There may, on the other hand, be reasons that particularly relate to any one of them. Other reasons may apply to some groups, but not to all of them. It may be said, for example, that marriage between close relatives produces weaker children, especially when it is repeated one generation after another. Hereditary weaknesses may be more pronounced in children of such marriages. Marriage of unrelated partners provides the chance to combine their stronger qualities, which, in turn, give strength to children and grandchildren.

It may also be said that in the case of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces and

their counterparts through suckling, and mothers- in-law and daughters-in-law, Islam wants a man's relationship with them to be one of care and respect. It should not be subject to what may take place in any marriage of differences leading to divorce, with all its bitterness. These should not be allowed to replace the feelings of love and care that one naturally has towards such close relatives.

It may further be said that Islam wants to preserve the paternal or brotherly and sisterly feelings with some of these groups, such as in the case of stepdaughters, one's wife's sisters, one's mother-in-law and stepmother. A mother who feels that her daughter may take her husband away from her cannot maintain intact her motherly feelings towards her own daughter. The same applies to sisters. Similarly, it is an unhealthy situation when a father feels that his own son may marry his wife. Again, when a son feels that his father who has died or who has divorced his wife is a hostile opponent, simply because the father was the former husband of the son's wife, the situation becomes terrible indeed. The same applies to any marital relationship with one's daughter-in-law. We have to remember that between every father and his son there is a tender and loving relationship that must be protected against anything which may adversely affect it.

We may add here that marriage is a cause for widening the circle of one's family, taking it beyond the narrow relationship of lineage. This precludes any need for marriage between those who are already related. Hence, such marriages are forbidden, except in the case of distant relatives.

Whatever the reason for the prohibition, we recognise that there must be a good cause and a benefit behind whatever God has chosen for us. Whether or not we know the wisdom behind any legislation should not affect in any way our acceptance of it. We must always be ready to implement it. True faith does not establish its roots unless we accept God's law and implement it without any hesitation.

Having explained this legislation in detail, we have to conclude with a few general remarks about the subject of forbidden marriages. Marriage with all these groups of women was forbidden in pre-Islamic Arabia, with the exception of two: former wives of parents or grandparents, and marriage with two sisters at the same time. These were permitted, albeit with reluctance. When Islam forbids these marriages, it does not endorse a prevalent tradition in Arabia. It initiates its own prohibition, based on its own authority. Hence, the prohibiting statement: *"Forbidden to you [in marriage] are your mothers..."* (Verse 23)

This is not a matter of technicalities or formalities. It is a matter of principle which pervades the Islamic faith and all its legislation. For the central issue in Islam is that Godhead belongs solely to God. Hence, permission and prohibition is the jurisdiction of God alone, because they are the most essential qualities of Godhead. He alone can

make certain things lawful to mankind and can forbid them others. No one else can claim this authority or issue any legislation of this type, because that would be synonymous with claiming Godhead for himself.

When a non-Islamic society issues legislation permitting certain things and forbidding others, this legislation is invalid in part and in whole, and cannot be given validity in any way because its existence is not recognised. When Islam considers the legislation of any non-Islamic society, it initially rules that all this legislation is invalid and nonexistent, simply because it is issued by someone or some institution which has no authority to issue it. Islam goes on to initiate its own legislation. If in the process Islam permits something other societies also permit, or forbids what they forbid, its action is not an endorsement of what those societies have legislated. How could it endorse what it considers invalid?

This principle applies to everything in human life. No one other than God can issue any legislation, which permits or forbids anything, whether it relates to marriage, food, drink, appearance, action, contracts, transactions, values, traditions or any situation whatsoever. The authority for all this must derive from God, and any legislation issued must be based on God's law.

This is how Islam has initiated its laws, established its systems and set its traditions in operation. In all this, it has operated its own authority. The Qur'ān emphasises this principle in all manner of ways, arguing with non-believers about everything that they have forbidden or permitted. Many a verse asks a rhetorical question, such as: *"Say: who has forbidden the ornaments and the good provisions God has provided for his servants?"* (7: 32) Many make emphatic statements concerning what is lawful and what is not, as in the case of the following two examples: *"Say: Come and I will read to you what your Lord has forbidden you."* (6: 151) *"Say: 'I do not find in what has been revealed to me anything forbidden for anyone to eat, unless it be carrion, blood or pig meat..."* (6: 145) Verses like these abound in the Qur'ān.

All these rhetorical questions aim at one and the same thing. They seek to emphasise the basic principle that the authority to give permissions and make prohibitions belongs to God alone. This is a right which cannot be claimed by human beings, whether an individual, a class, a nation or indeed mankind as a whole. The only way for them to enjoy such a right is to have permission from God and to exercise that right according to God's law. To permit and forbid is to legislate, which is synonymous with faith. The one who permits and forbids is the one who establishes the faith and the one to whom people submit. If it is God who does that, then people submit to God and they follow His faith. If it is someone else, then people submit to that person to the exclusion of God's faith.

When the matter is put in this light, we understand it as a question of the essence

and qualities of Godhead. It is a question of faith and its limits and boundaries. Let Muslims throughout the world consider their position with regard to Islamic faith, if they truly want to be Muslims.

The Crime of Advocating Free Sex

> *And (forbidden to you are) all married women, other than those whom your right hands possess. This is God's ordinance, binding upon you. Lawful to you are all women other than these, provided that, offering them of your own possessions, you seek to take them in wedlock not in fornication.* (Verse 24)

The first sentence in this verse makes it clear that married women are, as a result of their marriage, not lawful for other women to marry. This means that polyandry is forbidden in Islam. This is in line with the basic rule in Islamic society that makes the family its constituent unit. It must be protected against any confusion in relationships that may result from "sexual communism" or promiscuity.

The family, which comes into existence through a marriage made in public to unite one woman with one man in order to ensure the preservation of chastity, is the perfect system which fits in with human nature and meets the real needs of man. It is a system that serves the objectives of human life, which transcend man's sexual needs, and helps achieve the goals of human society. It also ensures peace of mind for the individual, the family and the community.

Everyone knows that the human child needs a much longer period of upbringing than the progeny of any animal. Moreover, the education a child needs in order to comprehend the requirements of civilised human life takes a similarly long period.

In animals, the sexual desire has no further objectives than intercourse and procreation. In man, however, it has a much finer objective which establishes a permanent link between the male and the female in order to provide an environment suitable for bringing up children who are able to protect themselves and satisfy their needs. It also serves the more important purpose of educating the child and helping him to gain experience and acquire a good standard of knowledge. Thus, the child will be able to contribute to the life of his community and discharge his responsibility in advancing human civilisation.

Sexual desire, then, is not the paramount element in the life of the two human sexes. It is a means implanted in their nature so that their companionship lasts well beyond their sexual contact. It is not their inclination to each other that determines how long they remain together. It is their sense of duty towards their helpless offspring and towards their human society. It is society that assigns to parents the responsibility of taking good care of their offspring until such children are able to

play their own part in the achievement of the goals of human existence.

All these considerations make the family the only proper platform for companionship between the two sexes. It also makes the system which assigns one woman to one man the only proper system which ensures the continuity of this companionship. Duty becomes the paramount consideration in the establishment and continuation of the family as well as in solving any problem it may encounter and, in extreme cases, at the time of its dissolution. Any attempt to devalue family ties or weaken the family's foundation on duty or to substitute it for temporary passion and burning desire is wicked and criminal, not only because it helps spread promiscuity in human society but also because it destroys human society and pulls down its foundations.

When we remember this, we can appreciate the magnitude of the crime perpetrated by writers and the media who make it their task to weaken family ties and devalue marriage. They depict the same in a very bad light so as to glorify those built on burning, carnal desires and temporary passions. What a bad service they perform when they speak highly of these relationships while at the same time they ridicule marriage.

We can also appreciate the great wisdom of `Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he said to a man who came to him expressing his desire to divorce his wife on the grounds that he no longer loved her: "Think properly, man! Are families built only on love? What room is then left for loyalty and mutual care?" `Umar based his argument on the Qur'ānic directive to God's best servants: *"Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good."* (Verse 19) This directive helps a Muslim to place duty before personal desire. He, therefore, tries hard to solve his problems with his wife amicably. He does not sever the family relationship unless all attempts to achieve proper reconciliation have failed. This attitude gives priority to the care that needs to be taken of the young who should be spared the shocks of changing passions.

Compared with this noble view of marriage, the arguments of those who glorify all relationships except the one which gives priority to duty and which takes care of the primary task of bringing up future generations appear decidedly absurd. Yet we find immoral writers and wicked media encouraging every wife who experiences some coolness towards her husband to rush for a boyfriend. They describe her relationship with that boyfriend as "sacred", whilst at the same time describing her relationship with her husband as one whereby she is "selling her body".

In making His legislation clear, God says: *"Forbidden to you are all married women."* This is what God says which is clearly opposite to what those immoral writers say. It is *"God who says the truth, and it is He who guides to the right path."* (33: 4)

Organised efforts are being made in order to establish social values and standards and to create foundations for human relationships that are at variance with those established by God. They seek to determine a line for people and for human life altogether different from that determined by God. Those who are behind such efforts imagine that what they will ultimately achieve is the destruction of the foundations of Islamic society in Muslim countries. They believe that when the ideology and moral standards of these societies are destroyed, there will no longer be any barriers to prevent them from achieving their old ambitions in these countries. The catastrophe which they are perpetrating goes far beyond this. Their efforts will lead to the destruction of the foundation of all human societies in their endeavour to ruin the basis of human nature. They remove the very elements that enable man to discharge his task of building a civilised existence worthy of him. They deprive him of raising well-balanced and properly equipped children in a happy family atmosphere, who will take over the task of serving the interests of mankind. These considerations are totally different from the sort of sex and procreation practised by animals.

The curse of self-destruction will affect all mankind, as the present generation undermines the prospects of future generations through indulgence in carnal desires. God's judgement will come to pass against those who rebel against His decrees and directives and the nature He has given to man. All mankind will suffer as a result, unless they are rescued by a community of believers that establishes God's system on earth and shows it clearly to others so that they too may adopt it. This is the only way to rescue them from the calamity that they themselves perpetrate while imagining that they are simply destroying Muslim societies. It is painful to see that these evil designs are also served by writers and the media in Muslim countries.

Legitimate Relationships

"[Forbidden to you are] all married women, other than those whom your right hands possess." This exception is made in the case of women who fell captive to Muslims in their *jihād* campaigns. These might, prior to their captivity, have had husbands in their countries which remained at war with the Muslim society. Thus, the physical distance separating them severed their relationships with their unbelieving husbands. As they had no husbands in the land of Islam, they were in the same position as unmarried women. It was sufficient to ascertain that they were not pregnant by observing a waiting period consisting of one menstruation cycle. Thereafter, it was legitimate for them to marry, if they became Muslims. Alternatively, it was legitimate for a person to whom such a captive woman belonged to have sex with her as "one whom his right hand possessed". This applied whether the woman became a Muslim or not.

We have already explained in detail the attitude of Islam towards slavery (Volume I, pp. 262-4). Further explanation will be given in the commentary on *Sūrah* 47, entitled Muĥammad. It is sufficient for our purpose here to explain that in the matter of imposing slavery on war captives, Islam adopted the rule of equal treatment with its enemies. Islam has always been superior to its enemies in its kind treatment of slaves as human beings. This was inevitable because the enslavement of war captives was an international institution that could not be unilaterally abolished by Islam. Otherwise, Muslim captives would have been enslaved while unbelievers who fell captive to Muslims would remain free. This would have tilted the balance in favour of un-Islamic societies. They would no longer have had an incentive to attack the Muslim state, knowing that their captives would never be enslaved.

Therefore, it was inevitable that there would be unbelieving women falling captive to the Muslim society. But what to do with them? Their natural needs would not be totally satisfied with food and drink. There was another aspect which needed satisfying, and had this not been facilitated, promiscuity would have endangered the whole society. Muslims could not marry them as long as they remained unbelievers. There was only one way out. That was to make an unbelieving captive woman lawful for her master only after making sure that she was not pregnant and after her relationship with her former unbelieving husband was totally and physically severed.

The verse goes on to explain which women are lawful to marry. Before it does so, however, it identifies the source of this legislation, namely God. Only God has the authority to forbid something and legitimise another and to issue legislation in all matters whatsoever: *"This is God's ordinance, binding upon you."* (Verse 24) It is, then, a directive from God, not a question of desire, tradition, or local institutions. People must observe what He legislates for them and abide by it. In turn, they are accountable for its implementation.

We have already pointed out that most of the women whom we are forbidden to marry according to the Qur'ān were also forbidden in the Arabian society in pre-Islamic days. The only ones that were not so forbidden were former wives of parents and marriage to two or more sisters at the same time. The Qur'ān does not simply endorse a practice followed in pre-Islamic days. Rather, we are told that this prohibition is a binding ordinance issued by God. This is a point which merits careful consideration as it relates to the essence of Islamic faith. Moreover, its effects are highly important to us in our practical lives.

Islam considers God's commandment and permission as the only basis for legislation. The authority to legislate belongs to Him in the final resort. Whatever is not based on this principle is essentially invalid and cannot subsequently be legitimised. Hence, whatever prevails in ignorant society, which includes every

human situation not based on the only true principle that acknowledges the authority to legislate solely to God, is invalid. This applies to concepts, values, standards, traditions, rules, regulations and laws. When Islam rules, it deals with life as a whole. It begins by abrogating all values, traditions and laws of *ignorance* in order to establish its own system. If, in the process, it approves a tradition that had prevailed in former, ignorant days, it does not accept it with its original foundation. It establishes it anew and gives it its own authority with God's permission. Thus, the practice of pre-Islamic days no longer exists, while a new practice is established in its stead under God's authority.

Similarly, when Islamic jurisprudence refers to "tradition" in certain matters, it imparts to tradition a new authority based on God's permission. Hence, tradition acquires in these particular questions the validity of Islamic law. It is no longer a case of society giving a tradition its authority. That authority is now imparted by God, the only Legislator who has approved of it as a source of judgement in certain cases.

This is a basic principle to which reference is made by the Qur'ānic statement: *"This is God's ordinance, binding upon you."* It is further endorsed by other Qur'ānic statements. Every time an aspect of legislation is mentioned in the Qur'ān, reference is made to the source that gives it its essential validity. When the Qur'ān refers to the laws, traditions and concepts of non-Islamic societies, it very frequently follows that reference with a clear statement that these "have not been given any authority by God." It thus emphasises their invalidity.

This principle is different from the other basic Islamic principle which states that all things and matters are initially permissible, unless they are made unlawful by a clear statement. The initial permissibility is granted by God. It enjoys God's authority. What we are speaking about here concerns that which ignorant societies legislate for themselves. All of which is initially and essentially invalid. It only becomes valid when God's law endorses any part of it, granting it proper legitimacy.

Dowry as a Condition of Marriage

Now that the *sūrah* has defined the women with whom a Muslim may not be married, linking such prohibition of marriages to God's decrees and ordinances, it goes on to define the area within which people may satisfy their natural desire through marriage. It sets out the way God approves of for the companionship between the two sexes, which leads to the establishment of families. In this way, the meeting between the two sexes provides enjoyment with purity. "*Lawful to you are all women other than these, provided that, offering them of your own possessions, you seek to take them in wedlock not in fornication. To those with whom you seek to enjoy marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them; but you will incur no sin if you agree among yourselves on*

any voluntary arrangement even after what has been stipulated by way of duty. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise." (Verse 24)

This Qur'ānic verse states that marriage with any woman other than those listed as forbidden is legitimate. Anyone who wishes to have such a marriage may spend of his money, by way of dowry, not to buy enjoyment outside the marriage bond. Hence, the verse states: *"Provided that, offering them of your own possessions, you seek to take them in wedlock not in fornication."* This condition is stated perfectly clearly even before the sentence is finished. Moreover, the condition is stated first in a positive form, *"you seek to take them in wedlock,"* which is immediately followed by the negative form, *"not in fornication."* Thus no ambiguity whatsoever overshadows this legislation. It describes without any equivocation the nature of the type of relationship Islam approves of, namely marriage, and the nature of the relationship it outlaws, that being promiscuity in any form. Promiscuous relationships, whether as fornication or prostitution, were practised and approved of in pre-Islamic Arabian society. This is clear in the following report given by `Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife:

> There were four types of man-woman relationship in ignorant days. The first is the same as marriage today: A man makes his proposal to another man to marry a girl in his charge or his daughter, pays her dower and gets married to her.
>
> The second type is that in which a man says to his wife after she has finished her menstruation period: "Contact this person [he names a certain man] and get pregnant by him." Her husband then keeps away from her and does not sleep with her until her pregnancy by the other man becomes manifest. When it is clear that she is pregnant, her husband may take her to bed if he wants. The reason behind this is that the husband wants to have a child of better blood. This relationship is known as having a child through another man.
>
> A third form of relationship was that a number of men, less than 10, may share one woman, with each of them having intercourse with her. If she became pregnant, then a few nights after she gives birth, she calls them all for a meeting. None of them can absent himself. When they meet, she says to them: "You know what has passed between me and you. I have given birth to a child. I want you to know that it is the child of ..." She names any one of them and he becomes the father of the child. He cannot decline to acknowledge his parenthood.
>
> The fourth form was that of many men frequenting the lodging of a certain woman who does not refuse anyone. These were prostitutes and they used to put a flag on their doors. Anyone who wanted them was welcome. When any such prostitute was pregnant, they collected money for her after she gave

> birth and called in an expert in physiognomy to trace resemblance of features and so determine the parenthood of that child. He would claim it without objection, and the child would be called after him. (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

The third and fourth types come under the umbrella of fornication, which is forbidden, whether in a private relationship or in a case of prostitution. The first type is that of honest wedlock which is encouraged. The second is something that we find ourselves at a loss in trying to furnish it with an appropriate name.

The Qur'ān describes the nature of the type of relationship God approves of: it is one of honesty, chastity and mutual care. It is wedlock, for both man and woman, which protects their chastity in a clean and straightforward manner. It is also a protection of the home, the family and of children. It provides the strong foundation for the healthy institution we call the family.

Any other form is rejected. It is worth noting that the Arabic term the Qur'ān uses to describe such a relationship is derived from a root which denotes pouring water over low ground. Therefore, it connotes the wasting by both man and woman of the fluid which brings life and which God has created in order to preserve our species and bring about progress through the participation of both man and woman in the upbringing and protection of children. It is wasted over a momentary pleasure. In other words, it is poured over low ground. It does not protect them against impurity, nor does it protect their children against waste.

In two short phrases, the Qur'ān delineates two images of two types of life. Furthermore, it achieves its purpose of promoting the acceptable and of degrading the unacceptable, while stating at the same time the true nature of each type. In this and other features of word economy, the Qur'ānic style is unique.

Having stated the condition that money should be spent for marriage, an explanation of how this is to be conducted follows: *"To those with whom you seek to enjoy marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them."* (Verse 24) The dowry, then, is something a woman may claim by right for what she gives her husband. A man who wants to fulfil his desire with a woman whom he can wed must seek her through marriage for the purpose of preserving his own and her own chastity. He must also pay her dowry as a stipulated duty. It is not something he gives her by way of charity. Nor can he inherit her without having to pay her dowry, as used to happen in ignorant, pre-Islamic days. Nor is it possible for him to enter into a trade-in relationship like that which once happened and still happens in ignorant societies. That is, an exchange deal between two men, whereby each gave the other a woman in his charge to be his wife. Thus, the two girls or women were traded like animals or inanimate objects.

Having established this right of dowry, which is owed to the woman, the possibility is left open for the married couple to agree between them any arrangement which is suitable to their circumstances, according to their own wishes and feelings towards each other: *"But you will incur no sin if you agree among yourselves on any voluntary arrangement even after what has been stipulated by way of duty. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 24) This means that the wife can forgo part or all of her dowry after it has been clearly stipulated. Her dowry belongs to her by right and she is free to do with it what she likes, without interference from anyone. Hence, it is permissible for her to forgo any part of it. Equally, it is permissible for her husband to give her more than her stipulated dowry. Such an increase is his own prerogative. To make any such arrangement is open to them without restriction.

The concluding comment in this verse relates these legal provisions to their source, who has true knowledge and perfect wisdom: *"God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise."* It is on the basis of His knowledge and wisdom that He has decreed these legal provisions. When a Muslim realises from what source he has received laws which affect every aspect of his life, especially his private relationship with his wife, he is reassured that such laws can only be the right ones, since they derive from God's wisdom and knowledge.

Marriage with a Slave Woman

When a Muslim finds himself in circumstances that make it practically impossible to marry a free woman who is likely to be more mindful of her chastity, he may use the concession to marry a slave woman so as to resist the temptation of sin.

> *Any of you who, owing to circumstances, is not in a position to marry a free believing woman may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess. God knows all about your faith: you belong to one another. Marry them, then, with their people's consent and give them their dowers in an equitable manner, as chaste women who give themselves in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as women who have secret love companions. If after their marriage, they are guilty of gross immoral conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free women are liable. This provision applies to those of you who fear to stumble into sin. Yet it is better for you to be patient. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.* (Verse 25)

The religion of Islam deals with man within the limitations of his nature, abilities and practical life. It takes him by the hand, elevating him from the depths of *ignorance* to the sublime horizon of Islamic life. At the same time, it provides him with all that he needs. What takes place in an ignorant society is not inevitable. *Ignorant* standards are low and Islam wants to elevate humanity to a higher standard. Islam is aware that, by his nature, man is capable of reaching a high standard. It is

true that man may sink in the mud of ignorance, but it is equally true that man is able to reach to the sublime. It is God alone who knows human nature fully, because He has created mankind and is aware of what thoughts work themselves into the human mind: *"How could it be that He who has created all should not know all? He is indeed unfathomable in His wisdom, All-Aware."* (67: 14)

In the early Muslim society, slaves were a by-product of war. Their position needed to be sorted out by setting them free either for no return, or in a mutual exchange of prisoners, or for compensation, according to the different circumstances that prevailed between the Muslim community and its enemies. Islam handled that situation by granting permission to masters only to have sexual intercourse with slave women whom they owned. This arrangement took care of the natural needs of those women as was explained in our commentary on the preceding verse. Such a relationship could either be a marital one, if they were believers, or an extra-marital one provided that it was determined that they were not pregnant. A waiting period lasting until they had had one menstruation period was observed. No men other than their masters were allowed to have intercourse with them except through marriage. They were not permitted to sell themselves for money, nor were their masters allowed to make them prostitutes.

This verse regulates the methods and circumstances which permitted their marriage: *"Any of you who, owing to circumstances, is not in a position to marry a free believing woman may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess"*. (Verse 25) Islam prefers for its followers to marry free women if they are able to do so. Freedom imparts dignity to a woman, which enables her to protect her chastity and safeguard her husband's honour.

A free woman has a family and a reputation to protect. She is too proud to allow herself to sink into the depths of promiscuity. A slave woman does not have the same considerations. Even when she is married, traces from her bondage days remain with her. Hence, she does not have the same attitude towards chastity and personal dignity as a free woman. She does not have a family reputation to worry about. Moreover, her children were treated as a class lower than the children of free women.

All these considerations were present in the society to which this verse was first addressed. It is natural, in view of all this, that Islam should prefer marriage with free women. Marriage with a bondswoman was treated as a concession given to those who were of limited means and who found it difficult to stay away from sin. In such cases, when temptation is too strong and financial resources are not available, Islam does not deprive its followers of a chance to have a proper relationship through marriage with slave women.

This is followed by an explanation of the only acceptable method for the relationship between free men and non-free women. It is the same form of marriage as with free women. The first condition is that the women in question must be believers: *"Any of you who, owing to circumstances, is not in a position to marry a free believing woman may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess."* (Verse 25) The second condition is that they must be given their dowries, which is a right owing to them, and not to their masters.

No one else has a claim to any part of that dowry: *"Marry them, then, with their people's consent and give them their dowers in an equitable manner."* (Verse 25)

The third condition is that they should be paid their dues in the form of a dowry, and the enjoyment must be through marriage, not through fornication with one person or prostitution with many: *"as chaste women who give themselves in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as women who have secret love companions".*

Arabian society at that time was familiar with all these sorts of sexual relationships with free women, as explained in the report quoted above from `Ā'ishah. Prostitution among slave women was also commonplace. A number of notables would send out their slave women to earn money for them in this abominable way. `Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, the chief of the hypocrites in Madinah and the chief of his tribe prior to Islam, had four slave women whom he set to prostitution, taking their ill-gotten gains. Islam came to rescue and purify the Arabs, as all humanity, from such stinking filth.

We see clearly that Islam allowed only one sort of companionship between free men and those "maidens", namely, marriage in which one woman is united with one man to form a family. There is no question of allowing the free satisfaction of desire without restraints. What men have to pay is a dowry, which they owe as a duty. It is not a payment given to a prostitute for a temporary acquaintance. Thus does Islam purify the man-woman relationship, even among slaves, of all the dirt of *ignorance,* into the depth of which humanity sinks every time it ignores Islam, including during our present times.

Before we turn to the next statement in this Qur'ānic verse, we need to reflect a little on the way the Qur'ān expresses the relationship which exists between free people and slaves in Islamic society and how Islam views this situation when it occurs in real life. The Qur'ānic verse does not use a term like slave or bondswoman. Rather, it refers to them all as "maidens". The expression runs as follows: "*Any of you ... may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess."* (Verse 25)

Moreover, no racial discrimination is entertained between free and unfree people, as was practised in all societies at that time, and which divided mankind into

different classes. On the contrary, the Qur'ān reminds us all that we have the same origin and establishes our relationship on the ties of humanity and faith which we all share: *"God knows all about your faith: you belong to one another."* It does not describe the people who "own" a slave woman as her "masters", but instead refers to them as her "people" or family: *"Marry them, then, with their people's consent."* The dowry such a slave woman receives is not given to her master; she has full claim to it. This means that the dowry is not included in the rule that all earnings by a slave belong to the master. The dowry is not classified as "earning"; it is a right that accrues to the woman as a result of her becoming lawful to a certain man: *"And give them their dowers in an equitable manner."* Furthermore, they are not looked down upon as women who sell themselves. Indeed, the reverse is true: they are *"chaste women who give themselves in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as women who have secret love companions".* (Verse 25)

All these considerations give an honourable view of the humanity of those girls, even when they are in the situation of slavery brought about by temporary circumstances. This situation does not affect the fact that they are human beings who must be treated with respect. When we compare this honourable outlook with the view which prevailed all over the world and which deprived slaves of every claim to being human like their masters, and denied them all rights to which they were entitled by virtue of being human, we can appreciate the great gulf between the two. Islam places the dignity and honour of man on a totally different level, and takes care of it in all circumstances, regardless of any temporary situation that may affect any group of people such as their slavery.

When we compare how Islam legislated for this emergency situation with what victorious armies in modern times do with the women of countries defeated in war, we appreciate just how large the gap is. We all know how soldiers "entertain" themselves. Enough has been heard of the filth in which victorious armies indulge themselves everywhere, leaving behind them a terrible legacy from which societies suffer for many years.

When Temptation is Hard to Resist

Islam provides for a reduced punishment for slave women who commit adultery after marriage. In this way, it takes into account the situation in which such a woman finds herself, understanding that this makes her more liable to sin and less able than a free woman to resist temptation. By its very nature, slavery reduces a woman's dignity or family reputation. These are the two elements that make a free woman more able to protect her chastity. It also takes into consideration the social and economic differences between a free woman and a slave girl. All these considerations

make a slave woman more complacent with regard to her honour and make it easier for her to yield to the temptation of money or position by her seducer. It is for this reason that the penalty for a slave woman who commits adultery after marriage is only half that of a free woman: *"If after their marriage, they are guilty of gross immoral conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which* free *women are liable."* (Verse 25)

It goes without saying that this represents the measurable penalty that can be halved, i.e. flogging. It does not apply to the penalty of stoning which cannot be divided. Hence, if a married believing slave commits adultery, she is given half the punishment of an unmarried free woman. If the slave who commits fornication is unmarried, her penalty is subject to different views among scholars. Some are of the opinion that it is the same, i.e. half the penalty of an unmarried free woman, and that the Imām or ruler administers it. Others are of the view that it is a reduced punishment, administered by her master. These views are argued in books of jurisprudence. We have no intention of delving into these details here. It is sufficient for our purposes to state that Islam takes into consideration all situations while at the same time helping people to maintain their purity and chastity.

This is an example of how Islam maintains a balanced view, taking into consideration all relevant factors. Knowing all that may be of influence in a slave's life, it does not legislate the same penalty for her as that for a free woman. On the other hand, it does not give undue weight to her circumstances, so as to exempt her altogether from punishment. It strikes the perfect balance.

On the other hand, Islam does not exploit the low position of slaves so as to increase their punishment, in the same way as all man-made laws used to do. Those laws treat people of high position leniently, while administering cruel punishments to those of lower positions. In the celebrated law of the Roman Empire, punishment was increased for all lowly classes. It stated: "A person who seduces a virtuous widow or a virgin shall be punished by the confiscation of half his wealth if he belongs to a noble family, and by flogging and exile if he comes from a low class." According to the Indian code known by the name of *Manū Shāstra,* a Brahman who commits a crime punishable by death may not be punished by the governor in any other way than by having his head shaved. Anyone else shall be executed. If an untouchable tries to hit a Brahman with his hand or with a stick, he shall have his hand chopped off. The Jews used to let a noble man who steals go without punishment, while the prescribed punishment was administered to ordinary thieves. (This is according to a *ĥadīth* related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.)

Islam on the other hand, sets the record straight. A criminal will always be punished, but only after taking all extenuating circumstances into account. Thus, for adultery committed by a slave woman after marriage, the prescribed punishment is half that administered to a free unmarried woman. Allowing her to go unpunished

means that her own will is non-existent. To say that is wrong. At the same time, Islam does not overlook her situation.

Some societies today, such as those in America and South Africa, practise a repugnant system of racial discrimination. Crimes which are overlooked when committed by an "honourable" white man are never forgiven when committed by a coloured person.[2] The same logic of *Jāhiliyyah,* or state of ignorance prevails wherever and whenever Divine faith is ignored. Islam implements its own philosophy in all places and throughout all generations.

The verse concludes with a statement which indicates clearly that to marry a slave woman is a concession given to a person who fears that he may yield to temptation and who finds it too hard to resist. A person who can remain patient, without afflicting himself, is better advised to do so, in view of what we have already outlined in connection with marriage with a slave girl: *"This provision applies to those of you who fear to stumble into sin. Yet it is better for you to be patient."* (Verse 25)

God neither wants to afflict His servants nor let them fall victim to temptation. It is true that the faith He has chosen for them inspires them to try to reach the sublime, but it wants them to do so within the limitations of their human nature and their own potentials, as well as their real needs. Hence, it gives them a code of living which is easy to follow. It takes notice of their nature, acknowledges their needs and appreciates their motives. What it will never do, however, is to cheer those who have sunk low. It neither glorifies their surrender, nor exempts them from their responsibility to try to resist temptation.

In this instance, Islam encourages its followers to remain patient until they are able to marry free women who can maintain their chastity after marriage. They are the ones who can establish happy families, give birth to a new noble generation, take good care of young children and remain faithful to their husbands. When that represents affliction and the temptation is too great to resist, a concession is given, coupled with an attempt to raise the standard of slave women through the honour given them. They are our "maidens" and we are their "people". All of us belong to one another, united in the tie of faith. God knows best who is of strong faith. They receive their dowries by way of right. Association with them may only be through marriage. They are liable to punishment if they err, albeit a reduced one in the circumstances: *"God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* This is a concluding comment on having to marry a slave woman and on the reduction of punishment in the case of erring slave girls. It is a suitable comment in both cases. God's forgiveness and mercy are needed in all situations and after every error.

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[2] It should be remembered that the author wrote this in the early 1960s — Translator's note.

What God Desires for Human Beings

> *God wants to make all this clear to you and to guide you in the [righteous] ways of life of those who have preceded you, and to turn to you in His mercy. God is All-Knowing, Wise. And God wants to turn to you in His mercy, while those who follow their lusts want you to go very far astray. God wants to lighten your burdens; for man has been created weak. (Verses 26- 28)*

These verses provide a perfect and comprehensive comment on the detailed legislation provided by Islam for the family. It is through this legislation that Islamic society is elevated psychologically, morally and socially to a very high, clean and healthy summit. The comment given in these verses reveals to the Muslim community the truth of what God wants for it by His prescription of these laws and regulations. At the same time, the aims of those who follow their lusts are also revealed.

God treats His servants with grace and reveals to them what lies behind His legislation, explaining to them the benefits they will reap as a result of implementing it. It is a gesture of honour, which God does to His servants by speaking thus to them: *"God wants to make all this clear to you."* He wants you to understand His wisdom and reflect on it with open eyes and minds. There is nothing enigmatic about His legislation. It is not made arbitrarily. Good servants of God as they *Oil* are, Muslims deserve to have this wisdom explained to them. This is an honour, which is appreciated only by those who understand the true nature of Godhead and what it means to be a servant of God.

"God wants to make all this clear to you and to guide you in the [righteous] ways of lift of those who have preceded you." (Verse 26) This method of life is the one that God has decreed for all believers. Its principles, aims and objectives are the same. It is designed for believers in all generations. It is in this sense that they constitute a single nation. Hence, the Qur'ān groups together those who have received true guidance in all generations and localities. This statement helps every Muslim to recognise his roots, the nation to which he belongs and the method he is required to follow. He is one of the faithful who are joined together despite differences of time, place, race and nationality by the bond of faith and a distinctive way of life to which they all subscribe.

"And to turn to you in His mercy." God, then, makes things clear and guides His servants in the traditions of those who have preceded them as a gesture of mercy that He extends to them. He takes them by the hand so that they can turn to Him in repentance. Thus, He facilitates their way for them and helps them proceed along that easy path.

"God is All-Knowing, Wise." These directives and legal provisions are, then, derived from His knowledge and wisdom. He knows people's hearts and souls, and knows what is suitable for them. He has exercised His wisdom in defining their constitution for them and shown them how to implement it.

"And God wants to turn to you in His mercy, while those who follow their lusts want you to go very far astray." (Verse 27) This short verse reveals the truth of what God wants for people when He established the method of life that He wants them to follow and the truth of what those who follow their lusts, straying far away from God's constitution, want for them. There is only one way of life that combines seriousness with commitment. All other methods merely follow passions and lusts, and constitute deviation and transgression.

What does God, then, want for people when He makes things clear for them and enacts His legislation for them? He simply wants to turn to them in His mercy. He wants to guide them so that they can avoid slips. He wants to help them elevate themselves to the high standards they are worthy of.

And what do those who follow their lusts and tempt people with methods and creeds that God has not sanctioned want for them? They indeed want them to go far astray from the straight path, the clear method and the route to elevation.

What about this particular area which the preceding passage regulates, namely, family relations, purity of society, and the only healthy and acceptable way through which men and women may be joined together, to the exclusion of all other methods? In this particular area, what does God want for people and what do those who follow their lusts want?

What God wants has been explained by the preceding verses which add purity and ease to a perfect system which assures the Muslim community of beneficial results. Those who follow their lusts want to shed all inhibitions so that desires are let loose, unrestricted by any religious, moral or social values. They want uninhibited promiscuity with all that it leads to of instability, spiritual disorder, family chaos and total disregard of honour. They want human beings to be like animals, so that males can have their females with nothing to check them. All this corruption and destruction is preached in the name of freedom. It is simply a false name given to lust and caprice.

It is against this evil that God warns the believers when He tells them that those who follow their lusts want them to go very far astray. Indeed, they spare no effort to achieve their purpose of forcing the Muslim community to sink back into the immorality of *ignorance,* after they have elevated themselves far above it through following the Islamic way of life. It is towards the same end that certain writers and institutions try hard to push our community when they concentrate their aims at

removing all social barriers which stand in the way of total promiscuity. This is a dreadful end from which there can be no protection except through the implementation of the Divine way of life by those who truly believe in God.

Man's Burden Made Light

The final word in this comment touches on man's weakness and the mercy God shows him by giving him a perfect law which lightens his burden and which removes all causes of harm and affliction from him:

"God wants to lighten your burdens; for man has been created weak." (Verse 28)

Within the area addressed by the preceding verses and regulated by the directives and legal provisions they contain, the Divine wish to lighten man's burden is clearly apparent. Natural desires are recognised and given a proper, healthy and fruitful method of satisfaction. God neither charges His servants with an unreasonable suppression of these desires, nor does He allow them to run loose after their pleasure without checks and controls. More generally, God's wish to make things easy for man appears very clearly in the constitution He has laid down for human life which takes into consideration man's nature, ability and real needs. It taps all man's constructive energy, protecting it against wasteful use.

Many people assume that adherence to the Divine method, especially in connection with the relationships between men and women, constitutes a heavy burden. They further claim that shedding all inhibitions to satisfy desires freely ensures ease and comfort. This is utter delusion. Seeking only one's own pleasure in every pursuit and removing the element of duty altogether, confining the objective of human sexual relations to that of its equivalent in the animal world, and removing all moral checks and social duties which influence relations between men and women may appear to give man ease and comfort. In reality, however, they weigh heavily upon man and increase his burden. Their consequences on society, and indeed on every individual, are harmful, wasteful, and destructive. A glance at the situation which prevails in societies that have emancipated themselves and shed the constraints of religion, morality and modesty is enough to make hearts shudder.

Uncontrolled sexual relationships were the major factor that led to the collapse of ancient civilisations, including those of Athens, Rome, and Persia. The same factor is now working for the destruction of Western civilisation. Those effects have appeared first in France and they can be clearly seen now in America, Sweden, England and other Western civilised countries. France is foremost because she took the lead in shedding moral inhibitions. She succumbed in every war she fought since 1870. All

indications are that France is moving fast towards total collapse.

> In the first place, the French people's sexual indulgence has gradually resulted in the loss of their physical strength. Ever-present emotional situations have broken down their power of resistance. Craze for sexual pleasures has left them with little or no forbearance, and the prevalence of venereal diseases has affected their national health fatally. Ever since the beginning of the 20th century, after every couple of years or so, the French military authorities have had to lower standards of physical fitness for new entrants, because young men coming up to the previous standards have day by day become rarer. This measure — with the accuracy of a thermometer — precisely indicates how fast has the French nation been losing its physical strength.[3] Venereal diseases are a major cause of its decline. During the first two years of World War I, the number of French soldiers who had to be hospitalised on account of syphilis was estimated at 75,000. In a garrison town of average importance, 242 soldiers were found suffering from this disease simultaneously. Imagine for a while the predicament in which the French nation was involved. On the one hand, it was facing a life and death situation and stood badly in need of the sincerest effort by every single soldier for its survival: each franc was precious, each second of time and each ounce of energy valuable, and all possible resources were called for in national defence. And on the other, thousands of young men lay useless for months together on account of sexual dissipation, and were thus becoming instrumental in squandering national wealth and resources on treatment at such a critical time.
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> According to Dr. Leredde, a French specialist, about 30,000 deaths are caused every year in France by syphilis and its immediate or ultimate results, which is the second biggest cause of death after tuberculosis. And syphilis is not the only venereal disease.[4]

The population of France has shown a serious downward tendency. Free sex and easy abortion have left little room for starting a family, and shouldering the responsibility for illegitimate children born after a brief temporary relationship. Hence, the number of marriages decreases, fewer children are born and France moves fast into the abyss.

Hardly 7 or 8 per thousand in France enter wedlock annually. This low percentage clearly indicates that there are big chunks of French population that are unmarried.

[3] The same is taking place in the United States where six out of every seven men at conscription age are found to be unfit for military service. God's laws never fail.

[4] A.A. Mawdūdī, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam,* Lahore, pp.51-2.

Among the few married ones there are even fewer who live chaste or marry with a view to living a morally clean life. Apart from this, they have all sorts of motives while entering matrimony, one common motive being to legitimise the child born or conceived before marriage. Paul Bureau writes that it has almost become a custom among the French working classes that a woman, before marriage, must have the assurance of her would-be husband to recognise a child who is not his. In 1917, a woman stated before a Civil Tribunal of the Seine:

> By these present I declare to my husband that in our union I have only the object of legitimising the children born of our `free' union, ... and not that of resuming our life together. I leave him on the day of our marriage at 5.30 p.m., in order to escape from conjugal duties which I have no intention of fulfilling. I give him by these present a deed of separation, to serve towards what is necessary in order to obtain a divorce.

The Principal of a great college in Paris told Paul Bureau:

> At the present time, many young men see in marriage nothing but the means of securing a mistress at home... For ten or twelve years they have roved a little in all directions, tasting various forms of licentiousness in various degrees. A day comes when they tire of this restless and irregular life; they take a lawful wife, convinced that with her will be combined the advantages of safety and tranquillity with those of licentiousness modified indeed but still sufficient and refined, to suit a less exacting appetite.[5]

These are the reasons for the decline of France and her defeat in every recent war. These have been the seed of France's eclipse and will be the reason for her further gradual decline. It may appear that God's law works very slowly but it never fails.[6]

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[5] Ibid., pp.53-4. [Mawdūdī says in his book that most of his information on the French situation is drawn from *Towards Moral Bankruptcy,* by Paul Bureau, a distinguished French sociologist, London, 1955.1

[6] It should be remembered that the author wrote this around 1961. The situation has now deteriorated much further and the appearance of AIDS and the threat that it poses to humanity at large confirms every word the author has said. The French government has recognised how serious the situation has become for France. In the late 1980s, the French government offered a new incentive for families to have more children. A family with three children is paid a large third-child allowance for three years after the birth of the third child. This child benefit is meant to allow the mother to stay at home while she brings up her children. This is further proof of the seriousness of the population situation in France, as explained by the author.

The author goes on to give further examples about the spread of promiscuity and how it affects Sweden, the United States and Britain. The story appears the same everywhere with the same effects and the same decline. However, much of what the author has to say is quoted from unspecified sources. As these are not available to us, it is felt that the French case should be sufficient by way of illustrating the author's idea — Translator's note.

All this is part of what humanity, in our present day state of ignorance, has to bear as a result of its following the dictates of those who insist on following carnal desires and who adamantly refuse to follow the way of life God has chosen for mankind. That is a way of life characterised by its easy implementation, reducing the human burden, protecting human society against immorality, leading man along a safe and secure course, that ensures purity, cleanliness and repentance of any slip into sin. *"God wants to lighten your burdens; for man has been created weak."* (Verse 28)

3
Fairness in All Deals

Believers, do not devour each other's wealth illegally, unless it be through trade which you conduct by mutual consent. Do not kill yourselves, for God is merciful to you. (29)

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَأْكُلُوٓا۟
أَمْوَٰلَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِٱلْبَـٰطِلِ إِلَّآ أَن
تَكُونَ تِجَـٰرَةً عَن تَرَاضٍ مِّنكُمْ ۚ وَلَا
تَقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا
﴿٢٩﴾

Whoever does this with malicious intent and by way of willful wrongdoing, We shall make to suffer the Fire. That is very easy for God. (30)

وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ عُدْوَٰنًا وَظُلْمًا فَسَوْفَ
نُصْلِيهِ نَارًا ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ
يَسِيرًا ﴿٣٠﴾

If you avoid the most serious of what you are Forbidden, We will erase your bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory. (3 1)

إِن تَجْتَنِبُوا۟ كَبَآئِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ
عَنكُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُم مُّدْخَلًا
كَرِيمًا ﴿٣١﴾

Do not covet the bounties God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have a benefit of what they earn and women shall have a benefit of what they earn. Therefore, ask God to give you out of His bounty. God is a witness of everything. (32)

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا۟ مَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦ بَعْضَكُمْ
عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا
ٱكْتَسَبُوا۟ ۖ وَلِلنِّسَآءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا ٱكْتَسَبْنَ ۚ
وَسْـَٔلُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مِن فَضْلِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ
بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٣٢﴾

To everyone have We appointed heirs to property left by parents and relatives. As for those with whom you have made covenants give them their share. God is indeed witness to all things. (33)

وَلِكُلٍّ جَعَلۡنَا مَوَٰلِيَ مِمَّا تَرَكَ ٱلۡوَٰلِدَانِ
وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ عَقَدَتۡ
أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡ فَـَٔاتُوهُمۡ نَصِيبَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded. As for those women from whom you have reason to fear rebellion, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them. Then, if they pay you heed, do not seek any pretext to harm them. God is indeed Most High, Great. (34)

ٱلرِّجَالُ قَوَّٰمُونَ عَلَى ٱلنِّسَآءِ بِمَا
فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بَعۡضَهُمۡ عَلَىٰ بَعۡضٖ وَبِمَآ
أَنفَقُواْ مِنۡ أَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡۚ فَٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتُ قَٰنِتَٰتٌ
حَٰفِظَٰتٞ لِّلۡغَيۡبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَٱلَّٰتِي
تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ
وَٱهۡجُرُوهُنَّ فِي ٱلۡمَضَاجِعِ وَٱضۡرِبُوهُنَّۖ
فَإِنۡ أَطَعۡنَكُمۡ فَلَا تَبۡغُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ سَبِيلًاۗ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيّٗا كَبِيرٗا ﴿٣٤﴾

If you have reason to fear that a breach may occur between a (married) couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people. If they both want to set things aright, God will bring about their reconciliation. God is indeed All-Knowing, Aware of all things. (35)

وَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ شِقَاقَ بَيۡنِهِمَا فَٱبۡعَثُواْ حَكَمٗا
مِّنۡ أَهۡلِهِۦ وَحَكَمٗا مِّنۡ أَهۡلِهَآ إِن يُرِيدَآ
إِصۡلَٰحٗا يُوَفِّقِ ٱللَّهُ بَيۡنَهُمَآۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ
عَلِيمًا خَبِيرٗا ﴿٣٥﴾

Overview

This passage aims at the organisation of a certain aspect of financial dealings in Islamic society, in order that such dealings be conducted with purity and good-will. It goes on to establish the rights of earning and ownership to women on an equal footing with men, according to their respective dues. It legislates for pledges or contracts of allegiance, which were observed in pre-Islamic days as well as in the

early years of Islam. The aim here is to liquidate this system and make blood relations the only claimants to inheritance.

The passage is yet another lesson aiming at the refinement of Islamic character. At the same time it lays down new legal provisions. The two purposes go hand in hand, complementing each other. What God legislates for Islamic society refines the Islamic character and organises all practical aspects of life. Legal provisions are intertwined with instructions which cultivate consciences and create a genuine feeling that the seriousness of Islamic law takes every care of the interests of the community. This ensures that they are properly implemented. Moreover, both the legal provisions and moral instructions enhance awareness that this system is well-balanced and complete. It provides solutions to problems encountered in practical life, while enhancing at the same time the role of human conscience.

Which Transactions Are Lawful

> *Believers, do not devour each other's wealth illegally, unless it be through trade which you conduct by mutual consent. Do not kill yourselves, for God is merciful to you.* (Verse 29)

This passage begins with a prohibition against illegally devouring other people's money, explaining that it is only through trade that people may gain money from one another. Illegal gains are described as killing oneself and as utter loss. This is coupled with a warning against incurring punishment in the hereafter as well as a comforting touch in the form of a promise of forgiveness and assured help. The passage also emphasises that people must not covet what others may have. They should instead ask God to give them what they wish, for He is the One who gives in abundance. These directives come side by side with the establishment of the rights of earning and ownership to both man and woman. At this point, the Qur'ān stresses that God is aware of all things. Instructions given with regard to contracts of allegiance stressing the duty to fulfil these contracts and pledges are followed with a statement that God witnesses everything. Both statements of God's knowledge leave very strong impressions on us. They come, after all, from God, who is well aware of man's constitution and what influences his attitude.

The passage begins with an address to believers prohibiting all forms of illegal gain and profit. This suggests that what follows aims at the eradication of traces of past, *ignorant* life from Islamic society. When Muslims are addressed by God as believers, the address serves as a reminder of what faith entails.

What we have here is a prohibition on devouring one another's wealth illegally. This includes all forms of financial transactions that God has not sanctioned or has

forbidden, such as cheating, bribery, gambling, monopoly, hoarding of essential goods and all forbidden forms of trade, particularly usury. We are not certain whether this verse was revealed before or after usury, in all its forms, was outlawed. If it preceded that, then it serves as a preliminary prohibition for usury as the worst form of devouring other people's wealth illegally. Alternatively, if this verse was revealed after the prohibition of usury, then it includes usury as an illegal form of financial transaction.

An exception is made of commercial transactions whereby the buyer and seller enter into these willingly: *"Believers, do not devour each other's wealth illegally, unless it be through trade which you conduct by mutual consent."* (Verse 29) Linguistically speaking, this is a special way of making an exception. It means that if a commercial transaction is conducted by mutual consent, then it is not included in the prohibition. The way that this is expressed in the Qur'ān suggests that there is an element of confusion that combines it with other dealings, described as the illegal devouring of other people's money. We can understand this better if we remind ourselves of the Qur'ānic verses which prohibit usury in *Sūrah* 2, The Cow. We commented on these verses at length in Volume I, pp. 355-71. These verses quote usurers objecting to the prohibition of all usury, claiming that *"trade is just the same as usury".* (2: 275) God replies to them in the same verse, explaining: *"but God has made trade lawful and usury forbidden".* In defence of their accursed system, usurers were guilty of deliberate misrepresentation by claiming that trade which results in a profit produces an increase of the trader's money in the same way as usury, which also increases the usurer's money. Hence their claim that it was wrong to outlaw usury while making trade lawful.

The fact is that a great gulf separates ordinary trade transactions and usurious dealings. There is also a great difference between the benefits trade generates to people and the destructive effects brought about by usury.

Trade is a useful medium that brings commodities to consumers. Thus, it is a marketing service providing the motivation to improve goods and commodities and to make them available to the consumer. It is a service to both producer and consumer, which results in a profit gained by the trader. Skill and effort are essential for the gain to be made. A trader runs the risk of loss as also the prospect of profit.

None of these benefits can be attributed to usury. Usury places a heavy burden on industry, in the shape of interest, which is added to the cost of commodities. It also burdens the trader and consumer with the payment of interest paid by producers. As occurred when the capitalist system managed to gather strength, the usury system imposes a certain direction on industry and investment which does not take into account the interests of industry itself or of the consumers. The first priority is given to an increase in profits so that interest on loans can be paid. No objection is raised

even when priority is given to the production of luxury goods, even though the majority of people cannot meet their basic needs. No objection is heard even when large investments are devoted to projects aiming at the illegal satisfaction of lust. The destructive effects of all this on society are not even considered. Additionally, there is the element of ever-continuing profit given to capital, which runs no risk of loss and does not rely on skill or effort which are necessary for trade. The indictment of the usurious system has many more elements, all of which demand the death sentence for this system. Islam issued this sentence long ago.

It is this type of confusion between usury and trade which necessitated this clarification to be made in the form of an exception, stated in the Qur'ānic verse as: *"Believers, do not devour each other's wealth illegally, unless it be through trade which you conduct by mutual consent."* (Verse 29)

The verse ends with a startling comment: *"Do not kill yourselves, for God is merciful to you."* (Verse 29) This is how the Qur'ān comments on devouring one another's money illegally. It suggests that such practices have a highly destructive effect on society. It is indeed a crime, which amounts to murder. God forbids the believers to practise it because He is so merciful to them.

It is indeed the crime of suicide. Every time the practices of devouring other people's money illegally, such as usury, cheating, gambling, monopoly, hoarding, embezzlement, bribery, theft, and the selling of un-sellable things such as honour, honesty, and moral and religious values, spread within a community, then that community is sentenced to inevitable self-destruction. Such practices have always been rampant in ignorant societies, old and modern alike. God wants to spare the believers this type of self-destruction and lighten their load. He aims to save them from their weaknesses, for these are bound to destroy them whenever they follow the dictates of lust in preference to His directives.

Conditions for Forgiveness

> *Whoever does this with malicious intent and by way of willful wrongdoing, We shall make to suffer the Fire. That is very easy for God.* (Verse 30) *If you avoid the most serious of what you are forbidden, We will erase your bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory.* (Verse 31)

This first of these two verses warns those who unjustly and illegally devour each other's money that they will suffer the punishment of the hereafter after having destroyed themselves in this life. This applies to them all, since responsibility in such matters is a collective one. Any community which allows such injustice to spread is doomed in this life as well as in the life to come: *"Whoever does this with malicious*

intent and by way of willful wrongdoing, We shall make to suffer the Fire. That is very easy for God." (Verse 30)

As Islam makes its legislation known to people, it appoints everyone a watchful guard to ensure its implementation. It also makes the whole community watchful over one another, since the whole community shares in the responsibility to implement these legal provisions and the destruction which attends upon its failure to do so. Such destruction is bound to engulf the whole community. The punishment in the hereafter for allowing injustice to spread will apply to everyone in the community. That is certainly easy for God since nothing stands in His way. His law never fails when the conditions for its operation exist.

God, however, promises the believers to bestow His mercy on them and to forgive them their sins if they avoid cardinal sins. He, thus, takes into account their weaknesses and reassures them of their destiny once they refrain from the gravest of sins: *"If you avoid the most serious of what you are forbidden, We will erase your bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory."* (Verse 31)

This religion of ours is indeed very tolerant and its method easy to implement. These qualities go hand in hand with its appeal to man's sense of nobility, purity, cleanliness and willingness to obey God. Its commandments, as well as its legal provisions and punishments, work for the same aim of refining people's characters and the establishment of a pure and healthy society. It does not ignore human weakness and does not charge man with what is beyond his ability. It is not unaware of the complexity of factors working on man's mind and does not ignore human nature and motivation. It strikes the right balance between duty and ability, motives and restraints, ideals and necessities, orders and prohibitions, forgiveness of sin and fearful punishment for it.

This religion of Islam is satisfied that a person turns to God with sincerity and does his best to obey Him and win His pleasure. He will then find God's mercy and compassion, which overlook weakness, forgive slips, accept repentance and receive warmly those who turn back after having gone astray.

What signifies that a certain person does his best to seek God's pleasure is that he avoids the cardinal sins God has forbidden. Such sins, all of them well known, cannot be committed unwittingly or through lack of knowledge. Their commitment by anyone signifies that they have not made the required effort to resist temptation. Nevertheless, when a person who has committed such cardinal sins turns to God in genuine and sincere repentance, God, Who is committed to showing mercy to His servants, accepts his repentance. It is He who describes the God- fearing as those who *"when they commit a gross indecency or wrong themselves, remember God and pray for the forgiveness of their sins — for who but God forgives sins? — and do not knowingly*

persist in doing the wrong they may have done." (3: 135)

What we have here, however, is an assurance that God straightaway forgives the offences and effaces the errors of those of His servants who avoid cardinal sin. God here gives this promise and happy news to the believers.

Now, what constitutes these cardinal sins? Several *aĥādīth* speak of certain types of cardinal sin. We do not, however, have a full list of them all in any one *ĥadīth.* Each mentions some, which suggests that these *aĥādīth* addressed certain situations, mentioning the cardinal sins relevant to each situation. It is not difficult for a Muslim to identify these cardinal sins, although they may differ in number and gravity according to situations and generations.

It is useful to mention here a story demonstrating how Islam refined the sensitivity of `Umar ibn al-Khaţţāb, a man well known for his great piety and an ever-present consciousness of the need to avoid all sin. Islam gave `Umar a well-balanced insight that helped him show the moderation required of a leader when he shouldered the responsibility of running the affairs of the Muslim state. The story, reported by al-Ĥasan, mentions that some Egyptians spoke with `Abdullāh ibn `Amr, a Companion of the Prophet and the son of the governor of Egypt at the time of `Umar. In essence, they said: "We have observed that there are certain things mentioned in God's Book that are not enforced, although He has ordered these to be implemented. We thought that we should speak to the Caliph about them." Hence they, accompanied by `Abdullāh ibn `Amr, went to Madīnah. `Umar met with Abdullāh ibn `Amr and enquired as to the purpose of his journey. When `Abdullāh answered him, `Umar asked whether he had obtained the permission of his father. The reporter of the story does not actually say what `Abdullāh's answer was but that nonetheless `Abdullāh explained why he had come and that this pertained to the Eygptians' queries. `Umar, therefore, asked him to call them all to a meeting with him.

When they met, `Umar spoke to the first man and put to him the following question: "I ask you by God and by what you owe to Islam, have you read the whole of the Qur'ān?" He answered in the affirmative. `Umar asked whether he had implemented God's Book fully in his own life. He replied that he had not. The reporter comments that had the man answered in the affirmative, `Umar would have challenged him on this. `Umar continued his questioning and asked whether the man had implemented Islam fully with regard to what he saw or what he spoke or what he did. He asked everyone of the group the same questions. 'When he had finished, he said: "Are you asking `Umar to force people to implement God's Book? Our Lord knows that we will be committing errors." He than read this verse: *"If you avoid the most serious of what you are forbidden, We will erase your bad deeds."* (Verse 31) He then asked those Egyptians whether the people in Madinah were aware of the purpose of

their visit. When they answered in the negative, he said that had they known, he would have used their visit for admonition.

We observe from this story how `Umar, who was exemplary in his piety and fear of God, showed his refined sense and realism: "Our Lord knows that we will be committing errors." Indeed, we cannot be otherwise. What matters, however, is the willingness and determination to do one's duty, and to try one's level best to do it well. Thus, serious effort is balanced with moderation.

Honour for Both Men and Women

> *Do not covet the bounties God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have a benefit of what they earn and women shall have a benefit of what they earn. Therefore, ask God to give you out of His bounty. God is a witness of everything.* (Verse 32)

This verse, together with the one that follows, continue the discussion of the ties and transactions which exist between men and women. They also speak of the covenants of loyalty and their relevance to the system of inheritance that this *sūrah* discusses earlier.

First, we have a general prohibition against coveting the gifts God has favoured some believers with. This is a general statement that applies to all sorts of favours and privileges, which may include functions, positions, abilities, talents, wealth and other luxuries. A believer should appeal to God and pray to Him to grant him of His grace. He should not waste time feeling sorry for himself nor with all that such an attitude generates of harbouring grudges and greed, of feeling angry, deprived, or unjustly treated. Such feelings may give rise to thinking ill of God and His fair distribution. To harbour such a feeling is disastrous because it substitutes worry and misery for content and self confidence. Entertaining such evil thoughts wastes one's energy. To turn to God directly and to pray to Him for His grace is to turn to the source of all grace; it can never be exhausted and does not repel anyone. Moreover, it is in God that all hopes are placed and to Him alone that one should turn as one goes about, seeking one's share of God's grace.

As has already been said, this is a general directive. The fact that it comes at this point in the *sūrah,* as well as in a number of reports which speak of the occasion when it was revealed, may indicate that this verse refers specifically to a certain type of favour, namely, the difference in shares of inheritance between men and women. This is an extremely important aspect of the relationship between the two sexes which needs to be established on the solid foundation of mutual acceptance and complementarity, so that contentment prevails in the family and the Muslim society

at large. Despite the importance of this aspect, it does not limit the generality of the statement. Authoritative commentaries on the Qur'ān speak of both aspects, giving reports in support of both:

Umm Salamah, a wife of the Prophet, once said to him: "Messenger of God, men fight when we do not, and we receive half a share of inheritance." God subsequently revealed: *"Do not covet the bounties God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others."*

Another report also quotes Umm Salamah as saying to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, we do not fight so that we may be martyrs, and we do not have an equal share of inheritance". This verse was then revealed. Later, God revealed the verse in which He says: "*I will not suffer the work of any worker among you, male or female, to be lost."* (3: 195)

Al-Suddī, an early commentator on the Qur'ān, mentions that some men said: "We want to have twice the reward of women, in the same way as we have two shares of inheritance." Some women said: "We want to have a reward similar to that of martyrs. We cannot fight. Had we been required to fight, we would have done so." God turned down all that and said to them: "Pray for My grace." A similar view is attributed to another commentator, named Qatādah.

Other commentators stress the generality of the verse. Ibn `Abbās is quoted as saying: "No one should say: I wish I had as much money or as many children as this or that person. God has prohibited all that. He should pray to God to grant him of His grace." Similar views have been expressed by Al-Ĥasan, Muĥammad ibn Sīrīn, `Aţā' and others.

The first three reports suggest the presence of un-Islamic concepts in the relationship between men and women. There is also an air of competition between men and women. This is probably the result of the new freedoms and rights given by Islam to women, in accordance with its overall concept which honours the human race and treats both sexes with fairness. Islam, however, wants its complete system to be implemented, as a whole, not for the benefit of men at the expense of women, nor for the benefit of women at the expense of men. It wants its system to be implemented for the benefit of humanity as a whole, and for the benefit of Muslim society as it establishes the values of propriety, morality, goodness and absolute justice.

In its distribution of the functions and shares of inheritance between men and women, Islam observes human nature, which has made man different from woman and given each of them his or her distinctive characteristics. This is to enable them to discharge their respective duties, not for their own benefit but for the benefit of human life, which can only achieve proper fulfilment and its ultimate objectives

through the multiplicity of characteristics, functions and duties between the two different sexes. Because the characteristics and functions of man and woman are different, their positions and shares vary. The ultimate beneficiary is that great institution which we call human life.

When we consider the Islamic system as a whole and then consider that particular aspect which organises relationships between the two parts of the single soul from which both men and women have been created, we find no room for such ancient arguments of the type mentioned in the reports quoted above. Nor can we find any room for modern arguments advanced by shallow-minded people of both sexes.

It is useless and futile to try to depict matters as if a raging battle is going on between the two sexes in which points and victories are scored. The attempt by some serious writers to discredit women and to attribute all sorts of vices to them is equally futile, whether it is made in the name of Islam or under the guise of scholarly analysis. There is no question of a battle whatsoever. There are simply differences of characteristics and potentials. Differences in the proper distribution of tasks and specialities which achieves both complementarity and absolute justice, as can only be expected from the Divine method.

There may be a battle of this sort in ignorant societies which initiate their own systems according to their will and which serve their immediate interests, or, more probably, to serve the interests of certain classes, families or individuals. Such societies may deprive women of certain rights due to their defective understanding of man as a whole and the function of each of the two sexes. On the other hand, they may deprive women of some of their rights for economic reasons, such as giving a woman a lesser wage than a man who does the same job, or giving her a smaller share of inheritance or depriving her of the right to manage her own property.

There can be no room whatsoever for such a battle under Islam. There is no point in competing for worldly benefits or for an attack on either man or woman in order to undermine their positions and magnify their weaknesses. Given an Islamic outlook, no one can imagine that men and women, who are different in their characteristics and physical constitutions, should not have different tasks, duties and positions. To imagine that is to betray a total misunderstanding of the Islamic system and the nature of both sexes and their respective functions.

Differences between the Sexes

Let us now consider the question of *jihād* and martyrdom, and women's share in all that. This was a question of concern to God- fearing women in the noble first generation of Muslims, which was distinguished by its dedication to the hereafter as it looked after its daily affairs. We will also consider the question of inheritance and

the shares assigned by Islam to men and women. This question not only preoccupied some men and women in the past but continues to be raised even today.

God has not imposed the duty to fight on women. Nor has He forbidden them to fight when there is need for their participation in *jihād* alongside men. In Islamic wars a number of individual women took an active part in the fighting, thus not confining themselves to support duties alone. Their numbers, however, were very few, taking part only when needed. This was by no means the normal practice. It was the exception, not the rule, because God, in His wisdom, has not made fighting obligatory for women.

Women have not been required to fight in war because they give birth to men who do the fighting. By her physical and psychological constitution, a woman is made to give birth to men and to bring them up so that they can face life and participate in *jihād when* necessary. In this particular domain, her ability and usefulness is greater than that of man. Every single cell in her body is made physically and psychologically suitable for this purpose. This is not merely a question of physical constitution. It applies to every single cell, from the moment of conception and the decision made by the Creator, praised be He, which determines the sex of that pregnancy. Physical, organic, and psychological factors take secondary importance. She is also more useful when one considers long-term national interests.

When men fall dead in war, leaving behind women, the nation is left with productive members who give birth to children in order to compensate for the decrease in their numbers. The same cannot be the case if war were to claim the lives of women and men in equal numbers, or were it to claim the lives of more women than men. Under Islam, a single man using all the concessions and abilities available to him can make four women produce children in order to fill the vacuum left after the slaughter that takes place in war. A thousand men cannot make a single woman produce more children than one man can in order to redress the balance that takes place in society after war. This is only one aspect of the Divine wisdom behind relieving women of the duty of fighting. Other aspects relate to social morality and the nature of society, as well as the need to preserve the essential qualities of both sexes. This is a subject which deserves fuller treatment. As for reward, both men and women are reassured by God. It is sufficient for every human being to do well in fulfilling the tasks assigned to him or her in order to achieve a good position with God.

As for inheritance, it may appear at first glance that the general rule which assigns "to the male a share equal to that of two females" favours man. This superficial view, however, will soon disappear to be replaced by a comprehensive treatment of the respective positions of man and woman and their mutually complementary duties. A basic rule in the Islamic system states that "gain is commensurate with duty". The

man pays a dowry to the woman when he marries her, while she pays him no dowry whatsoever. He supports her and their children while she is exempt from such a duty, even when she has money of her own. The least that can happen to a man who is negligent of this duty is that he be imprisoned. A man is required to pay the ransom and compensation for accidental death and injuries caused to others by members of his family, while a woman is exempt from all this.

Moreover, a man is required to support the insolvent and those who are unable to earn their living in his family, according to their degree of kinship, while the woman is exempt from the duty of mutual family support. When divorce or separation takes place, the man pays his divorced or estranged wife compensation for breast-feeding his child and for her custody in the same way as he pays her own maintenance. As we see, then, the Islamic system is a comprehensive one, which distributes inheritance according to the distribution of liabilities. Since the man bears more liabilities than the woman, his share of inheritance is greater.

This system also takes into consideration human nature and man's ability to earn his family's livelihood and to provide the woman with security and comfort so that she can discharge her responsibilities in bringing up the new generation. No monetary value can be placed on this responsibility of hers. Her contribution to the general welfare of society is far superior to any product or service that anyone can render. We can, then, discern the elements of perfect balance in the Islamic system, laid down by the One whose knowledge and wisdom are absolute.

Let us consider here the right of individual ownership given by Islam to women: *"Men shall have a benefit of what they earn and women shall have a benefit of what they earn."* (Verse 32) This right was denied to women by the ignorant society of Arabia as well as by other ignorant societies of the past. Very rarely were women's right to own acknowledged. Indeed, even when it was acknowledged, ways and means were found to deprive her of that right. The woman herself was considered an object, the ownership of which could be transferred by inheritance, in the same way as other possessions.

Modern ignorant societies, which claim to have given women rights and afforded them respect unequalled under any other system, still try to deny women their right to inheritance. Some of these societies give the whole estate to the eldest male heir. Others make it necessary for a woman who wants to make any financial transaction to obtain the prior consent of her guardian, and they even make it necessary for a woman to have her husband endorse any financial deal she makes with her own property before it can go through. This remains the case even after the revolutions made by women to achieve their emancipation. Such actions have, indeed, led to undermining the position of women in both the family and society as also weakened public morality.

Islam has given the right of individual ownership to women of its own accord. Women did not have to launch a revolution, form women's societies or enter parliament in order to claim such a right. Islam's motives are found in its overall view of humanity. It considers that both parts of the single soul, from which men and women issue forth, are honourable. Moreover, it makes the family the basic unit of its social system. Hence, the atmosphere in the family must be one of love and mutual care. The rights of every individual in the family are safeguarded. It is for this reason that Islam gives both men and women equal rights of earning and ownership.

Before we finish our commentary on this verse, we would like to give the following quotation from Dr `Abd al-Wāĥid Wafī who explains in his book, *Human Rights,* the status of women in Islam as compared to their status in the West.

> Islam gives both man and woman an equal status in Front of the law and in all civil rights. This equality applies to married and unmarried women alike. Under Islam, marriage is different from what is practised in most Western countries. A Muslim woman does not lose her name, civil status, and eligibility to make contracts or right of ownership when she gets married. After her marriage, she retains the surname of her own family and continues to enjoy all her rights as before, including the undertaking of any responsibility and entering into any contract, to sell, buy, pledge, make a gift or a will, etc. She also continues to enjoy her right of independent ownership. Under Islam, a married woman is accorded all her civil rights and she may have her own wealth independently from that of her husband, who may not take any part of her money, small or large. God says in the Qur'ān: *"If you wish to take one wife in place of another and you have given the first one a large sum of money, do not take away anything of it. Would you take it away though that constitutes a gross injustice and a manifest sin?* (Verse 20) *How can you take it away when each of you has been privy with the other, and they have received from you a most solemn pledge?"* (Verses 20-1) He also says: *"It is not lawful for you to take back anything of what you have given them as dowry."* (2: 229) If a husband is forbidden to take anything of what he had originally given to his wife when he married her, then it is even more unlawful for him to take any part of her own property, unless she gives it to him willingly and freely. On this particular point, God states: *"Give women their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own accord, choose to give up to you a part of it, then you may take it with pleasure."* (Verse 4) Nor is it lawful for a husband to dispose of any part of his wife's property unless she permits him to do so or gives him a power of attorney to make a contract on her behalf. When she gives him such a power of attorney, she retains the right to cancel it and to give a similar power of

attorney to someone else.

Even the most civilised of contemporary democracies do not aspire to this standard of equality between men and women. Until very recently, indeed until today, the status of women in France was not much better than that of civil bondage. The law deprives her of the authority to act in many a civil matter. Article 217 of French Civil Law states that "even when a marriage stipulates that the properties of husband and wife are to remain separate, a married woman may not dispose of anything by way of gift, assignment, mortgage or pledge, and may not come into the ownership of anything in return for some or no consideration, unless her husband is party to the contract or gives his consent to it in writing.

Despite the numerous amendments that have been introduced to this Article, much of its import still overshadows the status of women under French law. Western laws emphasise this bondage imposed on women by endorsing the tradition that a woman loses her own family name at the moment when she gets married. She is no longer called after her father. She adopts her husband's family name instead. This is simply a token of the loss of her legal status which is merged with that of her husband's.

Strangely enough, many of our own women try to imitate Western women even in this unjust system. They accept for themselves this low status when they adopt their husbands' family names, instead of retaining the names of their own families as is the case under the Islamic system. Ironically speaking, this blind imitation is practised by the very women who pose as defenders of the rights of women and advocates of equality between them and men. They are unaware that by their action, they trample over their most important right which has been given to them by Islam to elevate them to the status of equality with men."[7]

Inheritance for Relatives Only

The *sūrah* then regulates those covenants of loyalty that existed before the provisions contained within the system of inheritance were revealed to limit the right of inheritance to close relatives only. Pledges of loyalty used to give shares of inheritance to others as well.

To everyone have We appointed heirs to property left by parents and relatives. As for

[7] The original book from which this quotation is taken was not available to the translator for more accurate documentation. The quotation is taken from the Arabic version of Dr Wafī's hook which was written in the early 1950s or earlier.

> *those with whom you have made covenants give them their share. God is indeed witness to all things.* (Verse 33)

Having stated that both men and women have the benefit of what they earn, and having already outlined the shares of inheritance of both males and females, the *sūrah* now mentions that God has appointed to everyone heirs from among his kinsfolk who will inherit what has come into his possession of the property of his parents and relatives. Through the inheritance system, then, money circulates from one generation to another. Heirs inherit their shares and add to them what they earn before they themselves leave that to their own close relatives. Thus, wealth is not monopolised by a single generation, family or individual. It is continuously circulated and inherited by one generation after another with different shares being given to different heirs, according to the situation.

This is followed by a reference to covenants which Islam initially approved of. These covenants or pledges of loyalty sometimes allowed wealth to be inherited by non-relatives. There were several types of such covenants in the early period of Islam. There was firstly the covenant of loyalty that came with freeing a slave. When a slave is freed, he becomes a member of his master's household, as it were. If he commits a crime which requires the payment of blood money, his former master pays this on his behalf, in the same way as he does when such a crime is committed by one of his close relatives. He also inherits him when he dies, leaving no immediate relatives behind.

The second type of covenant was one of pure loyalty. This allowed a non-Arab who had no heirs of his own to make a covenant with an Arab. It accorded him the status of a member of the Arab's household, whereby the latter would be willing to pay penalties on his behalf such as blood money, and who would inherit him upon his death.

The third type was that which the Prophet established between the Muhājirīn (his Companions who emigrated with him to Madinah) and the Anşār (his Companions from among the inhabitants of Madinah). This allowed an Anşārī to be inherited by one of the Muhājirīn alongside the Anşārī's own relatives, as if he was one of them, or to their exclusion, if they were unbelievers.

The fourth type of covenant was a straightforward pledge of loyalty stipulating that each of the two parties could inherit the other.

Islam abolished all these covenants, especially the third and fourth types. It stipulated that inheritance is the right of relatives only. It did not, however, abolish those covenants that were already in force. It continued to observe them but it made it clear that no new ones might be made. God states: *"As for those with whom you have*

made covenants give them their share." (Verse 33) He emphasises this by reminding us that He Himself is a witness to the covenant and to how it is observed: *"God is indeed witness to all things."* (Verse 33) The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: "No alliance may be made in Islam. Any covenant of alliance made prior to Islam has only been given added force under Islam." (Related by Aĥmad and Muslim.)

As it began to liquidate these covenants, Islam followed its normal method concerning financial affairs. Its solutions had no retroactive effect. Usury, for example, was abolished from the very moment its prohibition was revealed. What had been gained in the past was left alone. Although usury contracts were not made lawful, Islam did not order the recipients of usury to return what they had gained. In this instant, past covenants were observed, provided that they led to no new contract. One reason for this is that Islam did not wish to disrupt any practical situations that resulted from such covenants, as these may affect family and social relations. Hence, existing covenants were observed but no new ones were made.

This attitude reveals how Islam wants things to be easy. Moreover, the Islamic method in dealing with social affairs is profound, comprehensive, wise and far reaching. As it announced its abrogations and endorsements, Islam was moulding the Muslim society, purifying it of all traces of *ignorance.*

Regulation of Family Affairs

The last topic in this passage concerns the regulation of the family and the allocation of duties and responsibilities within it. The *sūrah* also outlines the measures to be taken in order to protect this social institution against the effects of quarrels and disputes so as to eliminate, as far as possible, any negative effects that could destroy it.

> *Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded.* (Verse 34)

Before we comment on these verses and outline their psychological and social objectives we need to speak briefly about the Islamic view of the institution of the family and its method of building, protecting and promoting it. However, we cannot speak about this in full detail because to do so would require a whole volume.

God, who has created mankind, is the One who has made duality part of man's nature, as it is indeed ingrained in all creation: "*And of everything We have created pairs, so that you may bear in mind [that God alone is One].*" (51: 49) He then willed to

make the human pair two halves of the same soul: *"Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate."* (Verse 1) Part of His purpose behind the meeting between the two halves of the same soul is that it should lead to peaceful existence and be a comfort to body and soul. It is also a means to protect purity and chastity and provides a secure, clean way for human reproduction and the continuity and promotion of human life, under the watchful care of parents. Different verses in the Qur'ān stress these facts: "*Among His signs is that He creates for you mates from among yourselves, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and compassion between you."* (30: 21) *"They are as a garment to you as you are to them."* (2: 187) *"Your wives are your tilth; go, then, to your filth as you may desire, but prepare well for yourselves and fear God."* (2: 223) *"Believers, ward off from yourselves and your families that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones."* (66: 6) *"As for the believers whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste."* (52: 21)

Because the two mates are two halves of the same soul, they stand in the same position in God's sight. Since God has given mankind a position of honour, He has honoured women, assigning to them the same reward for their good deeds, the same rights of ownership and inheritance, and the same rights of independence, as we have already explained.

Similarly, as regards the great responsibility of the family, which results from the meeting of the two halves of the same soul, God has taken care to detail a complete set of elaborate measures which regulate all aspects of the family institution and all its affairs. This *sūrah* outlines some of these measures, whilst other measures have been discussed in Volume I, *Sūrah* 2. Other *sūrahs,* particularly 24, 33, 65 and 66 include further measures. Together, these measures provide a complete and perfect system for the family. Their comprehensive outlook and attention to detail reflect the great importance Islam attaches to this crucial institution.

We hope that the reader may recall what we have said in earlier volumes about the length of the childhood period and the need of the human child for a caring and supporting environment until he is able to earn his living. What is even more important is that the child should receive the type of care which enables him or her to fulfil their social function in order to contribute to the betterment of human society, so as to leave it in a better state than they receive it. All this is particularly significant in explaining the importance of the family and the great care Islam takes to ensure its protection.

With this in mind, the next verse makes it clear that the man is in charge of the family institution, as God has given him the necessary qualities and training to undertake this task and assigned to him the duty of meeting the family's living expenses. It also outlines man's additional task to protect the family against collapse

as a result of fleeting whims, delineating the way to deal with these, should they occur. It also explains other "external" measures to which recourse may be made when all "internal" efforts have failed, and a total breakdown threatens not only the spouses but also the young ones who are more vulnerable. We will now look at these measures in some detail.

The Partner in Charge

> *Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth.* (Verse 34)

We have already said that the family is the first institution in human life in the sense that its influence is felt at every stage of human life. Moreover, it derives its importance from the fact that it is within the family that man, the most noble of all creatures according to the Islamic concept of life, is brought up. The running and administration of much inferior institutions, such as those engaged in financial, industrial and commercial affairs is normally assigned to those who are most qualified for the job by their education, training and natural abilities. It is only logical that the same rule be applied to the family, the institution that looks after the upbringing of the noblest creature in the universe, namely, man.

The Divine code of living takes human nature into consideration, as well as the natural abilities given to both man and woman to enable them to discharge the duties assigned to each of them. It maintains justice in the distribution of duties, giving to each of them only the type of duties to which they are suited.

Needless to say, both man and woman are the creation of God, who does not wish to do injustice to anyone He has created. Indeed, He gives each of His creatures the abilities and talents that befit the duties assigned to them.

God has created human beings as males and females, following the "dual" rule which is central to the system of creation. He has given the woman the great tasks of childbearing, breast-feeding and looking after her children. These are not tasks which can be fulfilled without careful preparation, physically, psychologically, and mentally. It is only just, therefore, that the other part, i.e. the man, should be assigned the task of providing the essential needs and the protection required for the woman to fulfil her highly important duties. She could not be given all those tasks and still be required to work in order to earn her living. It is only fair as well that the man be given the physical, mental and psychological qualities which enable him to fulfil his duties in the same way as the woman is given the abilities to fulfil hers. All this is clearly seen in real human life, because God maintains absolute justice among all.

Among the qualities the woman has been given are tenderness, quick reaction, and an instinctive response to the needs of children, without the need for much deliberation and reflection. The essential human need of even a single individual are not left to be deliberated upon at leisure. Response to them is made instinctively, so that they may be met more or less involuntarily. There is no external compulsion in this. It is an impulsive reaction, which the woman mostly enjoys despite the fact that it requires sacrifice from her. This is part of God's work, which is always perfect.

These are not superficial qualities. Indeed, they are implanted in the woman's physical, mental and psychological constitution. Some leading scientists believe that they are present in each cell in the woman's constitution, because they are rooted in the first cell that multiplies to form the foetus and the child.

On the other hand, among the qualities a man is given are toughness, slow reaction and response, as well as proper thought and reflection before action. All his functions, from the early days of being a hunter- gatherer, to fighting for the protection of his wife and children, to earning his living in any way, require some deliberation and consideration before taking a decision and implementing it. These qualities are also deeply rooted in man's constitution.

Man's qualities make him more able and better equipped to take charge of the family. Similarly, his duty to support his family, as part of that general distribution of functions, makes him more suited to overall authority. That is because earning his family's living is part of being in charge. Moreover, looking after the finances of the family is closer to his family duties.

In highlighting these two elements, the Qur'ān states that in Islamic society men are required to look after women. It is an assignment of duties on the basis of natural abilities and the fair distribution of responsibilities. Each party is assigned the duties most suited to its nature.

The man has the proper natural abilities to take charge of the family affairs, a role essential for the proper progress of human life. It is a simple fact that one party is properly equipped for this role and assigned the duty to play it while the other is not. Hence, it is totally unfair that the latter party should be required, in any situation, to take up these responsibilities in addition to its own. If women are given the necessary practical and scientific training to fulfil these duties, then their ability to play the other role, i.e. that of motherhood, is undermined.

These very serious questions should not be left to human beings to determine at will. When they have been left to human beings to decide, in both past and modern societies, the very existence of mankind was threatened and essential human qualities which distinguish man from other creatures were in danger of extinction.

There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the rules of human nature force

themselves on man, even when people deny them altogether. One aspect of this is the decline in the quality of human life and the serious danger to which it is exposed whenever this rule, which gives man the task and the authority to look after the family, has been violated. Such violation leads to confusion within the family, and is bound to have serious repercussions.

Moreover, women prefer for the man to assume authority and responsibility for the family. Many women worry, feel dissatisfied and unhappy, when they live with men who relinquish their role for any reason. Even women who try to challenge the man's role readily admit to this.

Another example of the social repercussions brought about by this unnatural family situation is one whereby children suffer from instability. This happens when the father does not play his role, either because of his weak character which allows the mother to overshadow or control him, or because of his early death or in one-parent families. This, in turn, can lead to mental perversion and behavioural deviation.

These are only a few examples through which human nature indicates its presence and the need to organise human life according to its laws.

To elaborate more on the role of the man as the one in charge of the family and its justification is beyond the scope of this commentary. What we need to state here, however, is that it does not by any means lead to the negation of the woman's character and role in the family home and in society at large. Nor does it mean the cancellation of her civil status. It simply defines her role within the family and how it is run. This is necessary, because the family is a very important institution, and one which must be protected and maintained. In any institution, the observance of certain values does not mean the abrogation of the character or the rights of the partners or the workers. Islam defines the role of the man and what his being in charge means, as well as his duties as the one who takes care of his family, protects it and earns its living.

In Recognition of Women's Virtues

> *Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded.* (Verse 34)

The verse moves on to explain the qualities of righteous women, their behaviour and duties within the family. *"The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded"* (Verse 34) It is, then, in the nature of the

righteous, believing woman and part of her essential characteristics to be devoted and obedient. Devotion means willing obedience, motivated by love, not the sort of obedience enforced against one's will. Hence, the Qur'ān uses the term "devout", or *qānitāt* to stress its pleasant psychological connotations, which fit perfectly with the sort of affectionate and compassionate relationship which exists between man and woman, the two parts of the single soul from which all mankind descend. Islam stresses that this relationship is essential in the family home where young ones are reared.

It is also part of the nature and essential characteristics of a devoted, believing woman to guard the sanctity of her relationship with her husband. This she maintains in his presence as well as in his absence. She does not reveal what belongs only to him, as one half of the single soul which combines both of them, even inasmuch as a passing look, let alone a full dishonourable relationship. What is forbidden to reveal is decided neither by him nor by her. It is determined by God. It is *"the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded". It* is not a matter of pleasing a husband or allowing what he does not mind to be revealed or what society requires to be exposed, should the husband or society deviate from the Divine code of living. There is only one rule to determine the limits of what must be guarded. She has to guard that *"which God has ordained to be guarded".*

We note that the Qur'ān does not put this in the imperative form. It places much stronger emphasis on it by saying that this guardianship is part of the nature of righteous women and one of their essential characteristics. This statement exposes the flimsiness of the excuses advanced by some mentally defeated Muslims advocating ways and methods that are certain to lead to the collapse of the family only because these are practised in other communities. What must be guarded, willingly and obediently, is that which God has ordered to be guarded.

The ones who are not righteous are described here as rebellious. Their rebellion is given a physical description derived from standing on a high position to declare their mutiny. Islam does not wait for such a rebellion to take place, nor for the roles to become so confused that the family institution splits into two camps. When the situation reaches that point, it is almost impossible to sort out. The treatment must be administered before the rebellion gathers momentum. Once rebellion establishes its roots, the family home is deprived of the peace and affection necessary for the upbringing of children. The whole setup collapses and the young become the victims divided between the two parents or brought up in an atmosphere which makes the family home a fertile place for psychological, mental and physical disorders to multiply and a suitable place for perversion to establish itself.

It is, then, a very serious matter. Gradual treatment must be administered when the early signs of rebellion become apparent. In order to preserve the family and

protect it from destruction, the one who is placed in charge is allowed to take some disciplinary steps that are often effective. He does not take them as retaliatory measures or to humiliate or torture his partner, but to achieve reconciliation and preserve the family in the very early stages of dispute.

When Family Life Is Endangered

> *As for those women from whom you have reason to fear rebellion, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them. Then, if they pay you heed, do not seek any pretext to harm them. God is indeed Most High, Great.* (Verse 34)

Before we consider these measures and how they progress from one stage to another, we need to remember what we have already said about the honour God gives to both men and women, giving women their rights for which they are qualified by being human. We should also remember that a Muslim woman retains her independent civil status. The fact that the man is placed in charge of the family does not deprive the woman of her right to choose her partner and to administer her personal and financial affairs. This, as also the great importance Islam attaches to the family, helps us to understand clearly why these disciplinary measures have been allowed and the nature of their application.

They are indeed pre-emptive measures aimed at achieving an early reconciliation when rebellion is feared. There is no question of trying to aggravate the situation or increase hatred. There is no battle between the man and the woman. These measures are not aimed at knocking the woman on the head when she begins to rebel and confining her again to her prison cell. No such thoughts are ever condoned by Islam. They might have crept into the traditions of certain societies at certain stages. Such measures, however, are an indication that mankind, not merely one sex, have sunk to a very low depth. In Islam the situation is widely different in form, substance and aim.

"As for those women from whom you have reason to fear rebellion, admonish them first." (Verse 34) Admonition, then, is the first stage. It is a responsibility of the one who is in charge of the family to admonish against untoward tendencies. Such admonition is required in a variety of situations: *"Believers, ward off from yourselves and your families that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones."* (66: 6) In this particular instance, admonition has a definite aim, which is to treat the symptoms of rebellion before it develops and takes root.

In some cases, admonition may not bring about the desired results. This is possibly because of strongly held views, uncontrolled reactions, too much consciousness of one's beauty, wealth, family position or the like. Any of these

reasons may make a wife forget that she is a partner in an institution, not an adversary in a contest. At this stage the second measure is employed, which is in effect a gesture of dignity, stressing that everything in which a certain woman takes pride, such as beauty or wealth, to stress her superiority does not count for much with him: *"Then leave them alone in bed."* (Verse 34)

It is in bed that a woman's temptation is most effective. A rebellious, self-conscious woman exercises her true power. When a man is able to overcome this temptation, he deprives the woman of her most effective weapon. In the majority of cases, a woman becomes more ready to give way when the man demonstrates a good measure of will-power in the most difficult of situations. There are, however, certain rules that apply as to how this measure is taken. It is confined to the room where the couple is alone. It should not be taken in front of the children, this so that they are not adversely affected by it. Nor can it be exercised in front of strangers, because it becomes very humiliating for the woman who may, consequently, be hardened in her rebellion. This is a measure which aims at dealing with rebellion, and does not aim to humiliate the wife or to bring about a bad influence on the children.

Nevertheless, this measure may not be effective in certain cases. Are we, then, to leave the family institution to collapse? There is another measure, admittedly more severe, but it may protect the family: *"Then beat them."* (Verse 34)

When we remember the aim behind all these measures, we realise that this beating is not a form of torture motivated by seeking revenge or humiliating an opponent. Nor is it aimed at forcing the wife to accept life under all unsatisfactory conditions. It is rather a disciplinary measure akin to the punishment a father or a teacher may impose on wayward children. Needless to say, there is no question of any of these measures being resorted to in the case of a healthy relationship between a man and his wife. They are preventive measures taken in an unhealthy situation in order to protect the family against collapse.

When neither admonition nor banishment from one's bed is effective, the situation may need a different type of remedy. Practical and psychological indications suggest that in certain situations this measure may be the appropriate one to remedy a certain perversion and to bring about satisfaction. Even when such a pathological perversion exists, a woman may not sufficiently feel the man's strength for her to accept his authority within the family, at least not unless he overcomes her physically. This is by no means applicable to all women. What we are saying is that such women do exist and that Islam considers this measure a last resort used necessarily to safeguard the family. We have to remember here that these measures are stipulated by the Creator, who knows His creation. No counter argument is valid against what the One who knows all and is aware of all things says. Indeed to stand against what God legislates may lead to a rejection of the faith altogether. What we

have to understand is that God has laid down these measures within a context that describes, in absolute clarity, their nature and aim and the intention behind them. Hence, mistaken concepts developing in periods of ignorance cannot be ascribed to Islam. In such periods, a man may become a jailer and a woman a slave under the pretext of following religious teachings. It may also happen that the man and the woman may exchange roles or that both of them are transformed into a third sex which is midway between man and woman claiming that this is the result of a new understanding of religious teachings. All such situations are not difficult to distinguish from the true sense and proper guidance of Islam.

These disciplinary measures have been approved of in order to deal with early signs of rebellion and before attitudes are hardened. At the same time, they are accompanied by stern warnings against misuse.

The practical example given by the Prophet in his treatment of his own family and his verbal teachings and directives serve as a restraint against going to excess in either direction. The Prophet answers Mu`āwiyah ibn Ĥaydah, who asked him what rights a wife may claim against her husband, by saying: "To provide her with food when you eat, and with clothes when you dress. You are not allowed to slap her on her face, insult her or banish her from your bed anywhere except at home." (Related by al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.)

The Prophet is reported to have given this general directive: "Do not beat up the women servants of God." `Umar later went to the Prophet and said that many women had become rebellious. The Prophet then allowed that they be beaten. Many women then came to the Prophet with complaints against their husbands. The Prophet addressed his Companions saying: "Many women have called at Muĥammad's home complaining against their husbands. Certainly these men are not the best among you." (Related by Abū Dāwūd, al- Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.)

The Prophet portrays this horrid picture of a man who beats up his wife: "Do not beat your wife like you beat your camel, for you will he flogging her early in the day and taking her to bed at night." He also says: "The best among you are those who are best to their family, and I am the best of you to my family." (Related by al-Tirmidhī and al- Ţabarānī.)

Taken in their proper context, these reports and directives give us a good idea of the conflict that existed in the early days of Islam between old habits inherited from the days of ignorance and Islamic directives. The same sort of conflict also took place in all other spheres before the new Islamic order managed finally to impress its values on human conscience.

God has, however, defined a limit when such measures must stop. Once the objective is reached with any one of these measures, then recourse to them is over:

"Then, if they pay you heed, do not seek any pretext to harm them. God is indeed Most High, Great." (Verse 34)

The aim is, thus, stated clearly: it is obedience based on positive response, not forced obedience. This latter type of obedience is not suited to the establishment of a healthy family. Moreover, the Qur'ānic verse states clearly that to continue to resort to any of these measures after the goal of obedience is achieved takes the husband beyond his allowed limits: *"Do not seek any pretext to harm them."* (Verse 34) This prohibition is followed by a reminder of the greatness of God so that people submit to His directives and repress any feeling of might or arrogance which they may entertain. This fits with the Qur'ānic method of combining temptation with warning: *"God is indeed Most High, Great."*

Last Resort to Save Troubled Marriages

All the measures so discussed apply in a situation where rebellion has not yet taken place. These measures are meant to deal with its early signs. When rebellion is brought out into the open, these measures are useless. At that stage there is a war between two hostile parties, each of them going out to smash the other. Similarly, these measures should not be used if it is felt that they will be ineffective or even counterproductive. In all such situations, Islam recommends a different process of saving this great institution, the family, from collapse: *"If you have reason to fear that a breach may occur between a (married) couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people. If they both want to set things aright, God will bring about their reconciliation. God is indeed All-Knowing, Aware of all things."* (Verse 35)

The Islamic method, then, does not favour an early split when signs of rebellion and hostility begin to appear. Nor does it approve that this institution be left to collapse over the heads of its other members who may be caught in a situation over which they have no control. This institution is very dear to Islam because it supplies the society with its new members whom it needs for its continued development and progress. Islam recommends that this last measure be resorted to when a breach is feared, not after it takes place. An arbiter from each of the two families of the husband and the wife meet in a friendly atmosphere, away from the influences which have caused the relationship between the husband and the wife to be strained and free from all the complications which overshadow the constructive elements in the life of the family. These arbiters must be keen to protect the reputation of both families. They care for the welfare of the children. Neither of them may entertain thoughts of forcing a submission by the other party. They must try to achieve what is best for the husband, the wife and their children.

They must also keep the family secrets because they belong to the two

immediately concerned families. Neither of them has an interest in publicising these secrets. Indeed, it is in their interest to keep them secret, unknown to other people.

The arbiters meet in order to try to achieve reconciliation. If the man and his wife truly desire such a reconciliation, but are only prevented from doing so by strong feelings of anger, then a serious effort by the arbiters will he successful, with God's help: *"If they both want to set things aright, God will bring about their reconciliation."* (Verse 35) Their own desire to bring about reconciliation is endorsed by God, who responds favourably to their serious wish. This is the relationship between people's efforts and God's will. It is indeed by God's will that events take place in people's lives. People, however, are free to try and exert efforts. The end result is decided by God on the basis of His knowledge of people's inner secrets and His awareness of what is best for them: *"God is indeed All-Knowing, Aware of all things."* (Verse 35)

Having studied this passage, we have now a good idea of the seriousness with which Islam views the relationship between man and woman and the institution of the family and the social ties that are established through the family. We can see how Islam has taken care to organise this highly important aspect of human life in order to elevate mankind to the high standard achievable only by the implementation of Divine guidance. That is indeed the only true and right guidance.

4
Unfailing Kindness

Worship God alone and do not associate with Him any partners. Be kind to your parents and near of kin, to orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is related to you and the neighbour who is a stranger, the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and those whom your right hands possess. God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; (36)

۞ وَٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُشۡرِكُواْ بِهِۦ شَيۡـٔٗاۖ
وَبِٱلۡوَٰلِدَيۡنِ إِحۡسَٰنٗا وَبِذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ
وَٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلۡمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلۡجَارِ ذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ
وَٱلۡجَارِ ٱلۡجُنُبِ وَٱلصَّاحِبِ بِٱلۡجَنۢبِ وَٱبۡنِ
ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا
يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخۡتَالٗا فَخُورًا ٣٦

[nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly, and conceal whatever God has bestowed on them of His bounty. We have prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers. (37)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَبۡخَلُونَ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ
بِٱلۡبُخۡلِ وَيَكۡتُمُونَ مَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ
مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۗ وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٗا
مُّهِينٗا ٣٧

And [God does not love] those who spend their wealth for the sake of ostentation, and do not believe in God and the Last Day. He who chooses Satan for a companion, an evil companion has he. (38)

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ رِئَآءَ ٱلنَّاسِ
وَلَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَلَا بِٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۗ
وَمَن يَكُنِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ لَهُۥ قَرِينٗا فَسَآءَ قَرِينٗا
٣٨

What would they have to fear if they would only believe in God and the Last Day, and spend (for His sake) out of that with which He has provided them. Indeed God has full knowledge of them. (39)

وَمَاذَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ لَوۡ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ
ٱلۡأٓخِرِ وَأَنفَقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ
بِهِمۡ عَلِيمًا ٣٩

Indeed God does not wrong anyone by as much as an atom's weight. And if there be a good deed, He will multiply it, and will bestow a great reward out of His grace. (40)

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَظۡلِمُ مِثۡقَالَ ذَرَّةٖۖ وَإِن تَكُ حَسَنَةٗ يُضَٰعِفۡهَا وَيُؤۡتِ مِن لَّدُنۡهُ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ٤٠

How will it be [on Judgement Day] when We shall bring a witness from every community, and call you as a witness against these people? (41)

فَكَيۡفَ إِذَا جِئۡنَا مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةِۭ بِشَهِيدٖ وَجِئۡنَا بِكَ عَلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ شَهِيدٗا ٤١

Those who disbelieved and disobeyed God's Messenger will on that Day wish that the earth may swallow them. They shall be able to conceal nothing from God. (42)

يَوۡمَئِذٖ يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَعَصَوُاْ ٱلرَّسُولَ لَوۡ تُسَوَّىٰ بِهِمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَلَا يَكۡتُمُونَ ٱللَّهَ حَدِيثٗا ٤٢

Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are drunk, [but wait] until you know what you are saying; nor when you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, except if you are on your way, until you have bathed. But if you are ill, or travelling, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have cohabited with a woman and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God is indeed Most Lenient, Much-Forgiving. (43)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَقۡرَبُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنتُمۡ سُكَٰرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعۡلَمُواْ مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغۡتَسِلُواْۚ وَإِن كُنتُم مَّرۡضَىٰٓ أَوۡ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوۡ جَآءَ أَحَدٞ مِّنكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡغَآئِطِ أَوۡ لَٰمَسۡتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَلَمۡ تَجِدُواْ مَآءٗ فَتَيَمَّمُواْ صَعِيدٗا طَيِّبٗا فَٱمۡسَحُواْ بِوُجُوهِكُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوًّا غَفُورًا ٤٣

Overview

A number of factors link the opening of this passage and the central theme of the *sūrah* on the one hand, and the main topics discussed in the last passage on the other. This passage starts with fresh effort to regulate the life of the Muslim community, purging it of the remaining traces of the state of ignorance that prevailed in pre-Islamic days and giving more prominence to the main features of the new Islamic life. It adds a clear warning against the scheming of the people of former religions,

particularly the Jews in Madinah. Evil is ingrained in their characters. It is the mark of all their dealings with the new Muslim community in Madinah. They exert strenuous efforts to disrupt its growth and progress, particularly in morality, in mutual co-operation and in solidarity which are the basic source of its strength.

The new passage reiterates the basic rule that is the central foundation of the new Muslim community. That is the belief in the absolute oneness of God. Indeed, the very life of the Muslim community and its code of living emanate from this basic belief.

Prior to this passage, the *sūrah* addressed several topics, including the family system and the social organisation of the Muslim community. The last passage dealt with the family, its structure, the methods for its protection and the ties which consolidate its structure. This new passage deals with social ties inside the Muslim community that go beyond the family, but which remain related to it. The link between these issues is provided by the reference to parents and to relationships that go beyond parenthood. Indeed, the perception of these ties takes place as a result of the caring and loving relationships within the family. Such care and love soon begin to transcend strict family relatives, so as to care for others. Without the love and kindness that prevail within the family, people would not be able to show much care for others with whom they have no family ties.

As the new passage includes directives to take good care of the immediate family and the large, human family, and to establish values and standards in this regard for the kind and generous on the one hand and the miserly on the other, it begins with the basic concept which gives rise to all values and standards. This is the concept of the oneness of God that is the basis of the Islamic way of life in its totality. The Islamic system relates every action, effort and feeling to the basic principle of submission to God and of worshipping Him. This is the ultimate objective of every human activity in the life of every Muslim.

As the passage speaks of submission and worship being due to God alone, the second part of the passage outlines some of the rulings concerning purity and prayer. It also takes the first step towards the prohibition of intoxicating drinks: when this *sūrah* was revealed, alcohol had not as yet been prohibited. This first step should be seen as a part of the ever-active method of educating the new Muslim society. Furthermore, this step is closely related to worship, prayer and belief in God's oneness. This is sufficient to show how all parts of the *sūrah* are inter-related, serving its central theme.

Kindness All Around

> *Worship God alone and do not associate with Him any partners. Be kind to your parents and near of kin, to orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is related to you and the neighbour who is a stranger, the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and those whom your right hands possess. God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful.* (Verse 36)

The passage starts with a clear commandment to worship God alone and a clear prohibition against associating partners with Him. We note that this verse begins with a conjunction which links it with the preceding orders that relate to the family and its affairs. This serves to stress the total unity that pervades all aspects of Islamic faith. Islam is not merely a number of beliefs that our minds accept, nor is it a host of rituals and acts of worship, nor a worldly system divorced from faith and worship. It is a way of life that combines all these aspects and unites them together on the basis of believing in the Oneness of God and deriving all systems and legislation from Him alone. There can be no split between accepting God's unity and implementing His legislation.

This is followed by an order to extend kind treatment to certain groups of one's immediate family and of the human family at large. Miserliness, conceit, boastfulness and suppression of God's favours, of whichever type, are denounced. This is coupled with a warning against following Satan, together with raising the prospect of punishment in the hereafter and all that attends on it of public humiliation. Again, all this is linked to the belief in God's oneness and to acknowledging that He is the only source of legislation.

In the Islamic system, all directives, laws, and legislation are derived from faith and are based on the basic concept of God's oneness. Hence, they are interlinked, mutually complementary and perfectly coherent. As a result, it is very difficult to isolate one part of Islamic legislation from the rest. The study of any one part without reference to its essential origin is unscholarly. The implementation of some parts of these laws to the exclusion of others falls short of implementing Islam and does not yield the full benefits to humanity which are sure to result from the actualisation of the Islamic system.

Under Islam, all concepts of human and universal relationships upon which all social, economic, political and moral systems are founded, and which affect all aspects of human relations are derived from believing in God. It is these concepts which give shape to human conscience and which characterise the basic set-up of human society. They make ordinary human dealings acts of worship because they are conducted in accordance with the Divine system, and they make worship the basis of all dealings because it refines conscience and improves behaviour. Thus, the whole of human life becomes a single solid unit, guided by the Divine system and seeks its ultimate fulfilment, both in this world and in the world to come, with God,

the only source of legislation.

"Worship God alone and do not associate with Him any partners." (Verse 36) The first commandment is to worship God, which is followed by a prohibition of worshipping anyone other than Him. This is a total and absolute prohibition of all sorts of worship which man has practised in all ages and communities. False gods, be they animate or inanimate objects, angels or devils, have been ascribed as partners to God in one way or another. No claim of this sort is ever allowed in Islam. It is absolutely forbidden for all time.

This is followed by a commandment to extend kindness to parents in particular and relatives in general. Most Divine orders in this particular area tend to emphasise the need to be kind to one's parents, although they do not overlook the other area of requiring parents to be kind to children. God is more merciful and compassionate to children than their own parents. But it is children who need to be directed more strongly to look after the older generation who stand in need of kindness. In most cases, the younger generation direct their feelings, sympathies and concerns to the generation which will follow them, not the preceding one, simply because in life people tend to look forward without turning back. Hence, these directives from the All-Merciful, the Compassionate, who does not neglect a parent or a child. It is He who has taught His servants how to be kind and compassionate to one another.

We also note in this verse, as in many others, that Divine directives begin by emphasising the need to be kind to one's relatives before widening their concern to include all those who need to be looked after in society or in humanity at large. This fits in perfectly with human nature. Compassion towards others begins at home, in one's own immediate family. A person who has not himself been a recipient of compassion in his childhood, within his family, hardly ever feels compassionate towards others. Moreover, man tends to look more favourably towards his relations, extending his kindness to them. There is no harm in this, as long as such compassion is continually enhanced and extended to a wider area so as to benefit more people.

Moreover, this directive to be kind to parents, relatives and other people fits in most coherently with the Islamic view of social organisation. It ensures that social security begins within the family before it is carried further to include the whole community. It does not entrust it to government machinery except when the smaller, more directly involved machinery of the family becomes incapable of meeting the challenge. Normally, smaller local units are more able to ensure that mutual social security is given at the right time, and with an ease and compassion that make the whole social set-up worthy of man.

In this particular verse, the directive begins by emphasising the need to be kind to parents, before widening the area to include kinsfolk, and then at a later stage,

extending this to orphans and the needy. These are given precedence over one's neighbours because their need may be more pressing and they must be looked after more immediately. Kindness is then urged towards a neighbour who may be a relation, and so to any other neighbour. Both take precedence over friends, because a neighbour always remains next to us. We meet our friends intermittently. Commentators on the Qur'ān have defined this type of friend as the one with whom we meet socially and whom we may choose as a travelling companion. The next type of person who deserves our kindness is a stranded wayfarer. This is followed by slaves who suffer the hardships of bondage, but with whom we have human ties common to all mankind.

This commandment to extend our kindness to all these groups is followed by a comment which denounces conceit and arrogance, miserliness, suppression of God's favours, boastfulness and showing off. All these are attributed to one basic cause, namely, lack of faith in God and the Day of Judgement.

Unfavourable Contrast

The verse which commanded all types of kindness ends with a comment denouncing such shameful qualities as arrogance, boastfulness, miserliness, concealment of God's bounty and deliberately giving foul impressions: *"God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; [nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly, and conceal whatever God has bestowed on them of His bounty. We have prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers. And [God does not love] those who spend their wealth for the sake of ostentation, and do not believe in God and the Last Day. He who chooses Satan for a companion, an evil companion has he."* (Verses 36-38)

Here again we note an especially important characteristic of the Islamic way of life which relates to all aspects of behaviour, and from which all feelings and all social relationships to faith are derived. When a person worships God alone and derives his values and principles from Him only, he will definitely extend his kindness to people, seeking to please God and hoping to receive reward in the hereafter. His kindness is characterised by a humble and gentle attitude which demonstrates his genuine belief that he only spends what God has granted him. He does not create his wealth. A person who denies God and the Day of Judgement is often arrogant and boastful. He is also a niggardly creature who encourages others to be niggardly. He tries to conceal the favours that God has bestowed on him, which is the opposite attitude of one who demonstrates his gratitude to God by extending his kindness to others. He may, on the other hand, spend some of what he has been given by God in order to publicise his generosity and to seek praise from others. Essentially, however, he does not believe in any other reward than people's adoration.

Here, then, the two opposite types of morality generated by faith and unfaith are clearly demonstrated. Motivation to do good and behave in a goodly manner is essentially the belief in God and the Day of Judgement and the eagerness to earn God's pleasure which ensures reward in the hereafter. It is indeed a sublime motivation, one which is not based in social tradition and which does not expect to be rewarded by other people. When faith is absent and a person does not believe in the Day of Judgement, the Day when he will receive reward for his actions, worldly values predominate. These do not remain constant even during the span of a single generation, let alone for all time and all places. When these constitute the basic motivation, values change in the same way as people change their likes and dislikes. We then have a breeding ground for all the bad qualities thus far mentioned, whether boastfulness, arrogance, niggardliness or hypocrisy.

The Qur'ānic statement says that God "does not love" such people. What we have to understand is that love and hate are not responses applicable to God. What is meant here is the result that is associated with such feelings in people's lives[§]: *"We have prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers."* (Verse 37) Humiliation is the proper response to arrogance and boastfulness. The Qur'ānic verse is couched in such a way as to arouse contempt of such people and disgust at their attitude, especially via the statement that Satan is their intimate friend: *"He who chooses Satan for a companion, an evil companion has he."* (Verse 38)

Some reports suggest that these verses refer to a group of Jews who lived in Madinah. These qualities certainly apply to Jews as well as to hypocrites. Both types were present in the Muslim society at the time. The reference to their concealment of the favours God has bestowed on them may also mean their concealment of the truth that is recorded in their Scriptures about Islam and the Prophet Muĥammad. The verse, however, is expressed as a general statement within the context of charity and kind treatment. It is better, therefore, that we understand it in this context.

This is followed by the rhetorical question: *"What would they have to fear if they would only believe in God and the Last Day, and spend (for His sake) out of that with which He has provided them. Indeed God has full knowledge of them. Indeed God does not wrong anyone by as much as an atom's weight. And if there be a good deed, He will multiply it, and will bestow a great reward out of His Grace."* (Verses 39-40)

Indeed, what do they have to fear from believing in God and the Last Day and spending of the provisions given to them by God. Since God knows their motives and what they have in their hearts and since He does not deny anyone his due reward for even the slightest of actions, then they cannot fear that their good actions

[§] For further discussion on the *Maĥabbah'* attribute, please refer to section 1.7 of *A Critique of 'In the Shade of the Qur'ān.'*

will go unnoticed or that their reward will not be forthcoming. Indeed, they will have an increase and a multiplication for their good deeds.

Even in the narrow sense of material loss and gain, faith gives better returns in all eventualities. Why should they, then, fear to believe in God and the Last Day and to spend of God's provisions? After all, they do not spend of something that they themselves have created. God provides it all for them. He, nevertheless, multiplies to them their reward and gives them an unlimited increase of His provisions. It is the sort of investment that is only rejected by an ignorant loser.

An Unhappy Final Wish

These orders, prohibitions and encouragements are concluded with a scene of the Day of Judgement in which we see feelings and attitudes fully animated before our eyes. All are portrayed in the Qur'ān's uniquely vivid style: *"How will it be [on Judgement Day] when We shall bring a witness from every community, and call you as a witness against these people? Those who disbelieved and disobeyed God's Messenger will on that Day wish that the earth may swallow them. They shall be able to conceal nothing from God."* (Verses 41-42)

This scene is depicted immediately after the preparations that began by the statement that God does not deny anyone an atom's weight of what is due to him or her. His scales maintain absolute justice. Furthermore, He multiplies good actions and gives them a great reward. This equates with mercy and compassion to those who deserve them. These are the ones who combine faith with action. As for the others, who have neither faith nor good actions, their state will be different. The question asked here is what will their state be when God brings a witness from every nation, i.e. the Prophet sent specifically to it, and, hence, when the Prophet Muĥammad will be a witness against the Arabs?

The scene is very vivid indeed, portrayed against a panoramic background in which every nation is present with its witness. We almost see those unbelievers: boastful, hypocritical, arrogant and niggardly people who conceal God's favours. We see them there when God's Messenger is asked to testify against them. We see them in the presence of the Creator whom they denied, the Provider whose favours they have concealed, on the Last Day in which they did not believe, and facing the Messenger whom they disobeyed. The Qur'ān asks: How then? It is certainly utter humiliation. Their shame is too great to bear. They regret what they have done and they acknowledge it since denial is of no value.

The Qur'ān does not describe all this as an apparent attitude. It portrays a mental attitude which gives us all these impressions so that we see the effect of humiliation, shame and regret: *"Those who disbelieved and disobeyed God's Messenger will on that Day*

wish that the earth may swallow them. They shall be able to conceal nothing from God." (Verse 42) It is through this fine expression and imagery that we sense all these ideas and recognise the unbelievers' feelings as they experience them. This approach is what makes the Qur'ānic style absolutely unique.

One Step Towards Forbidding Drinking

As we have seen, this passage started with the commands to worship God alone, associating no partners with Him. Prayer is the closest of all rituals to the central concept of worship. The following verse outlines some of the rulings connected with prayer and the purification which is required for its validity: *"Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are drunk, [but wait] until you know what you are saying; nor when you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, except if are on your way, until you have bathed. But if you are ill, or travelling, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have cohabited with a woman and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God is indeed Most Lenient, Much-Forgiving."* (Verse 43)

This verse represents one aspect of the Qur'ānic method for cultivating the Muslim community, enhancing its moral sense and refining its values. We should remember here that Islam picked up the Muslim community from the depths of ignorance, when drinking was a well-established social institution, as it is in almost all ignorant societies, ancient and modern. Drinking was a common habit in Roman, Byzantine and Persian societies, when they were at the zenith of their civilisation. It is also characteristic of contemporary European and American societies which are at the same stage. Similarly, it is very common in backward African societies.

In Sweden, which is considered one of the most civilised of contemporary societies, it used to be the case during the first half of the 19th century that every family brewed its own wine and other alcohol. On average, an individual consumed 20 litres.[1] The Swedish Government recognised the seriousness of this state of affairs, and that it led to major alcohol addiction. It, therefore, monopolised the production of intoxicants, thereby limiting individual consumption, and also restricted drinking in public places. More recently these restrictions have been relaxed.[2] Drinking was then allowed in restaurants, provided that wine was taken with a meal. Later, drinking was allowed in a limited number of public places until midnight. Thereafter, people could only drink beer and similar beverages with a lower alcohol content. Nevertheless, the number of alcoholics among teenagers is growing steadily.

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[1] The author does not mention a time context for this consumption. Presumably it is "per year" — Translator's note.

[2] This was written more than 40 years ago.

In America, the Government once tried to abolish drinking altogether, and promulgated a law to this effect in 1919, which was ridiculed as the "dry" law. It remained in force for 14 years until the American government found itself compelled to abolish it in 1933. All methods of enhancing public awareness of the harmful effects of drinking were utilised, including publications, the radio, cinema and public lectures. It is estimated that altogether the American administrations spent over 60 million dollars in campaigning against drink; a very large sum indeed by the standards of that period. Millions of pages were written against drinking in the form of books, pamphlets and the like. Moreover, at least 250 million dollars were spent on enforcing the law during those 14 years. Three hundred people were executed and more than half a million were imprisoned and fines exceeding 16 million dollars were imposed. The Government also confiscated properties worth more than 400 million dollars. In spite of all this, the pressure was too great for the American administrations and they were finally forced to cancel their prohibition laws.[1]

Islam, on the other hand, was able to successfully eradicate this well- entrenched habit, deploying only a few verses of the Qur'ān to do so. This is a striking example of the difference between Divine and human methods in dealing with man and in treating social ills. Pre-Islamic poetry is full of descriptions by Arab poets which show that drinking was a firmly rooted social habit in Arabia. Moreover, certain events took place in the early days of Islam, involving personalities from among the best renowned of the Prophet's Companions, such as `Umar, `Alī, Ĥamzah and `Abd al-Raĥmān ibn `Awf. These again indicate how deeply entrenched the drinking of intoxicants was in Arabian society. It is sufficient for our purposes here to give only a few examples.

`Umar ibn al-Khaţţab begins his report of how he became a Muslim by saying: "I used to drink heavily in my pre-Islamic days. I once decided to go to a particular public house to drink... "`Umar continued to drink when he became a Muslim until the revelation of the Qur'ānic verse stating: *"They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say: `In both there is great evil although they have some benefits for people, but their evil far exceeds their benefit.'"* (2: 219) When `Umar heard this Qur'ānic verse he said: "My Lord, give us a clear, categorical statement on wines."

He continued to drink and uttered the same prayer when the Qur'ānic verse, which is the subject of this commentary was revealed. When the express prohibition stated in *Sūrah* 5, entitled The Repast, or *Al-Mā'idah* was given, `Umar declared his submission and stopped drinking.

There are two reports involving `Alī, `Abd al-Raĥmān ibn `Awf [both from the Muhājirīn] and Sa`d ibn Mu`ādh [from the Anşār] which give the reasons behind the

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[1] A. Mawdudi, *Tangīhāt,* Lahore, 1998, pp. 37-8 (Urdu edition)

revelation of the present Qur'ānic verse. The first report quotes Sa`d as saying: "Four verses were revealed on my account. A man from the Anṣār invited a number of the Muhājirīn and a number of the Anṣār to a meal. We all ate and drank heavily. Some of us began boasting about our tribes. One man took the chin bone of a camel and pierced it into Sa`d's nose. Since then, Sa`d has had a pierced nose. This was prior to the prohibition of intoxicants. Shortly afterwards, the verse saying, *`Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are drunk"'* (Verse 43), was revealed.

The other report is attributed to `Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib who is quoted as saying: "`Abd al-Raĥmān ibn `Awf invited us to a meal and gave us a great deal to drink. We were under the influence of drink when it was time for prayer. One person was asked to lead us in prayer and he recited the *sūrah* entitled The Unbelievers, or *al-Kāfirūn,* changing its text so as to mean: `Unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, but we do worship what you worship.' (This is the opposite of its meaning.) God then revealed this verse: *"Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are drunk, [but wait] until you know what you are saying.'"* (Verse 43)

We do not need any more examples or stories to tell us how common the habit of drinking was in ignorant Arabian society. Both drinking and gambling were well-established social habits. How did the Islamic method deal with these phenomena? How did it combat this evil which makes it impossible to establish a good healthy society? We have to remember that social traditions and economic interests are involved in the promotion of such phenomena.

As we have already said, the Divine method dealt with these evils by simply using a few verses of the Qur'ān. Its approach was easy and gradual. It managed to win the battle without any need to fight, shed blood or sacrifice. The only thing that was shed was the wine itself. All barrels and other containers were spilt. Indeed, some of the Prophet's Companions were in the process of drinking when they heard of the prohibition and they spat out what was in their mouths.

Gradual Eradication of Evil Social Habits

When Islam did not have a state or the authority to rule in Makkah, there was only the authority of the Qur'ān. This was simply a moral authority. Therefore, only an indication of the forthcoming attitude towards drinking was given, which we may understand when we contemplate the verse which occurs in *Sūrah* 16, entitled The Bee, or *Al-Nahl: "From the fruits of date palm and vines you derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance."* (16: 67) Thus, intoxicants were placed as opposites to the wholesome sustenance made of the fruits of palm and vineyard trees. This suggests that intoxicants were something different from the sustenance described as "wholesome". All in all, this was merely a fine touch influencing an Islamic

conscience that was still in its infancy. Drinking, however, was far more than an individual's habit. It was a social tradition with far-reaching economic effects. This fine touch was not calculated to end this tradition.

In Madinah, however, Islam established a state which wielded proper authority. Nevertheless, intoxicants were not forbidden by the authority of the state and the force of law. The Islamic approach relied on the Qur'ān, working its gentle, steady and firm way, to make use of the Divine insight into man and his social realities.

The Islamic approach is gentle, gradual. It benefits from God's absolute knowledge of man, what is suitable for him and his social environment. The first statement in this approach was a verse revealed in *Sūrah* 2, entitled The Cow, or *Al-Baqarah.* This was given by way of an answer to questions which indicate that people with a fine Islamic conscience had begun to feel uneasy about drinking and gambling: *"They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say: 'In both there is great evil although they have some benefits for people, but their evil far exceeds their benefit.'"* (2: 219) This was the first loud knock on the door that was bound to have its effect on an Islamic conscience. The criterion which makes something lawful, discouraged or forbidden is whether its harm or evil is greater than its benefit. In this verse we have a clear statement that the case is such with regard to intoxicants and gambling. Their evil is far greater than their benefit. The question, however, went deeper than that. We find `Umar, who was, perhaps, endowed with the finest Islamic sense, uttering this prayer: "My Lord, give us a clear, categorical statement on wines." This shows how well entrenched the habit of drinking was in Arabian society.

Incidents like the ones quoted above took place. Hence, the verse we are now discussing was revealed to tell the believers: *"Do not attempt to pray when you are drunk, [but wait] until you know what you are saying."* (Verse 43) Here we find the wise, gentle approach in action, the verse representing the middle stage between showing drink as repugnant because its harm is greater than its benefit and a state of total prohibition where drink is seen as an impurity of Satan's work. The purpose of this middle stage being to break the habit of drinking by prohibiting it near prayer times, which span the whole day. Some prayers are too close to each other to allow anyone who is given to alcohol time to take one or two drinks and regain enough sobriety to be fully aware of what he is saying. Besides, there were special times for drinking, either early in the day or in the evening. Plus there were prayers that must be offered both in between these times and following them. Hence, a person with an Islamic sense was sure to weigh up the enjoyment he derives from drinking against neglecting his duty of prayer. At this stage, a good Muslim would not abandon his prayers for anything. Nevertheless, `Umar repeated his prayer: "My Lord, give us a clear, categorical statement on wines."

Time passed and events took place, and the moment arrived when the gradual

approach would give its final verdict. Two verses in the next *sūrah,* The Repast, or *Al-Mā'idah,* were revealed to state: *"Believers: intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing. Keep away from them so that you may prosper. By means of intoxicants and gambling Satan seeks only to sow the seeds of enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not, then, desist?"* (5: 90-1) All Muslims stopped drinking. Once the commandment was given, all wine containers were emptied and broken throughout Madinah. Indeed, those who were in the process of drinking did not swallow what was in their mouths when they were informed of the prohibition. It was, thus, a great triumph for the Qur'ān and its approach.

How did it all happen? How was this miracle, unparalleled in human history, achieved? It was all made possible because the Islamic approach works on man in a unique way. Essentially, it employs God's authority and a Muslim's keenness to please Him. To a Muslim, God oversees him at all times. Hence, he cannot lose sight of his top priority of trying to please God. Moreover, Islam gives its followers greater concerns to spend their time on, and these replace that time which was wasted on drinking and any pleasure derived from it. Any sense of loss, which weighs heavily on people in un-Islamic societies, is replaced with a pleasant feeling of fulfilment in the light of Islam, its freedom, and its sense of openness which unites this life with the life to come.

More importantly, Islam gives man the sense of fulfilment generated by faith. To a Muslim, this life becomes pleasant, happy, forward looking, enlightened with a sense of intimacy with God. Intoxicants, which work on the imagination and generate false feelings of happiness and also cause a real headache, no longer present any temptation for a Muslim. Like gambling and other such fun, drinking is a craze, which is not really different from any other craze, such as sporting events, speed races, cinema, fashion and bull fighting. These are simply a manifestation of a spiritual emptiness reflected in the absence of faith and a lack of high concern consuming one's energy. They are, in themselves, evidence of the bankruptcy of modern civilisation that finds itself unable to fulfil natural needs and to tap the natural resources of man in a clean, healthy way. It is such emptiness and bankruptcy that leads people to fill the vacuum they feel in their lives with wine and gambling. What is more, these social diseases are not only the cause of perversion but also of mental and nervous disorders.[1]

That miracle, which remains unique in the history of man, was not the result of mere words. It was the result of a complete approach defined by those words and formulated by the Lord of mankind, not by ordinary human beings. This is what distinguishes this approach from all man-made approaches, which, generally

[1] The original text is somewhat abridged here — Translator's note.

speaking, achieve very little.

The question is not how a certain idea or rule is stated. Philosophers, intellectuals, poets and rulers write extensively and formulate rules and maxims. Any philosopher or man of letters may write fine words which may appear to constitute a complete approach or a doctrine. However, such a doctrine has but little effect on people's minds and consciences because it has no authority behind it. It is the source of the statement that gives it authority. How can the words of a human being acquire an authority similar to that which is intrinsic in the system given to us by God? When the answer is clear in people's minds, they will stop formulating for themselves systems and rules which are different from those given to us by God, the Lord of mankind. Only He knows what is suitable for man and only His wisdom and ability are limitless. Yet people's conceit still prevents them from recognising these facts.

> *But if you are ill, or travelling, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have cohabited with a woman and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God is indeed Most Lenient, Much- Forgiving.* (Verse 43)

Islamic Worship Made Easy

Let us now look at this verse in detail: *"Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are drunk, [but wait] until you know what you are saying; nor when you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, except if you are on your way, until you have bathed"* (Verse 43) This stage of prohibiting intoxicants forbids the believers from even trying to pray when they are drunk, until they know fully what they are saying. Furthermore, this verse forbids believers from praying when they are in a state of ceremonial impurity, *or janābah,* before they have removed it by washing themselves, except in situations when they are "on their way".

Different interpretations have been given to the expression translated here as, "on your way". Similarly, different views are expressed with regard to the meaning of "attempting to pray" which may be rendered in a strictly literal translation as "do not come near to prayer", which this verse forbids. Some scholars say that a person who is in a state of ceremonial impurity, i.e. after sexual intercourse or seminal discharge, must not enter a mosque or stay in it until he has taken a bath. An exception is made in the case of he who wants only to pass through the mosque without staying. A number of the Prophet's Companions had their houses surrounding the Prophet's mosque, with their doors opening onto it. They had to go through the mosque when they wanted to go out or when they came back home. A concession, then, is given to those people to pass through the mosque when they are in a state of ceremonial impurity, provided that they do not stay in the mosque or

pray until they have had a bath.

Other scholars suggest that what is meant by the prohibition is the prayer itself. Muslims are not allowed to pray when they are in a state of ceremonial impurity without washing themselves first, unless they are travelling. In this case, a traveller is allowed to go to the mosque and pray, without having had a bath first, provided that he has had dry ablution, i.e. *tayammum,* which, in this case, replaces both lesser ablution, i.e. *wudū'* and full ablution, i.e. *ghusl.*

The first view seems to be the weightier one, because travelling is mentioned later on in the same verse. To say that the expression "on your way" means "travelling" would make the same rule be unnecessarily repeated twice in the same verse: *"But if you are ill, or travelling, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have cohabited with a woman and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God is indeed Most Lenient, Much-Forgiving."* (Verse 43) This part of the Qur'ānic verse mentions a traveller who finds himself in a state of ceremonial impurity and who needs to take a bath, or who answers the call of nature and thus needs to perform simple ablution in order to pray. The traveller is given, in this case, the same concession as a person who is ill and who needs to perform either simple or full ablution. The same applies to one who has come from the toilet, which is an expression indicating what people do there.

Different views have also been expressed concerning the meaning of *lāmastum-un-nisā',* which we have translated as meaning "cohabitation with a woman", while some scholars interpret is as "touching a woman". Some scholars believe that it refers to sexual intercourse, which makes it necessary for both partners to have a full bath. Another view explains touching women in any simple body contact. According to some schools of thought, such contact requires simple ablution, i.e. *wuđū'.* Other schools of thought do not make such a requirement. The case is discussed in great detail in books of *Fiqh. We* sum up these different views as follows: (1) touching a woman in any situation or any place requires ablution; (2) a touch requires ablution if the man who touches her is normally excited by such a touch and if she is one to excite a man when touched; (3) a touch requires ablution only if that particular touch stirs some feeling within the man, as he himself determines in every case; (4) a touch does not require ablution in every situation, not, for example, when it involves embracing or kissing one's wife.

Each of these views is supported by evidence from actions or statements attributed to the Prophet. Such differences are common in matters of detail. We are more inclined to the view that states "if you have touched women" signifies an action requiring full ablution, i.e. a bath, which is cohabitation. In opting for this view, we bypass all differences of opinion with regard to simple ablution or *wuđū*

In all the cases mentioned in this verse, whether they require full ablution or a simple one before one prays, *tayammum* or dry ablution is considered adequate compensation when water is not available, or when it is available but harmful to use. This is what is meant by the statement *"then have recourse to pure dust"*. (Verse 43) We are thus instructed to find a place where we can have pure dust, whether it is soil, stone, a wall, or indeed dust which settles on the body of a horse or a donkey or on a bed or a piece of furniture. If we strike such a surface with our hands and dust appears, then it is a suitable place at which to have dry ablution. The way to do this is to strike that dusty surface once with both hands, and to shake the dust off before passing one's hands over one's face and over one's hands up to the elbows. Some scholars require two strikes, then passing our hands over our faces after the first strike. We then follow the second strike by passing each of our palms over our opposite hand up to each elbow. There is no need to speak about such differences of opinion in detail here. What we know is that this religion of ours is made easy and the whole idea of dry ablution is symbolic of the ease with which God wants us to follow His instructions.

"God is indeed Most Lenient, Much-Forgiving." (Verse 43) This comment at the end of the verse stresses how God makes things easier for us. He knows that we are weak and assures us that He sympathises with our weaknesses, that He treats us with leniency and forgives us our failings.

Purpose of Islamic Legislation

Before we conclude our discussion of the present passage we need to reflect a little on certain points, and to try to understand the wisdom behind *tayammum,* or dry ablution.

Sometimes people who try to explain what lies behind certain Islamic legislation or aspects of Islamic worship, put their points of view very forcefully, implying that they have understood everything there is to understand. This is not the proper way to explain Qur'ānic statements and Islamic legislation, except where the reasons for such legislation are expressly stated in the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah.* It is always preferable to state our point of view adding that it is all that we have been able to understand of the wisdom behind a certain piece of legislation. The possibility cannot be excluded that there may be other reasons behind it which we have not been able to determine. In this way, we assign our human mind to its proper position, *vis-a-vis* Qur'ānic statements and Divine legislation.

What motivates me to say this is that some of us, who may have the best of intentions, try to present such statements and legislation to people within the context of a definite purpose which they may determine according to human knowledge or

scientific analysis. This is fine provided that it is put in the right perspective to which I have just alluded in the preceding paragraph. It has often been said that the purpose of having ablution before prayer is to maintain cleanliness. It may be true that cleanliness is intended through ablution, but to emphasise that it is the only reason why ablution is required before prayer is to follow an approach which is neither correct nor safe. Indeed, there came a time when some people suggested that there was no longer any need for this "primitive" method of cleanliness when we live in a clean environment, with people taking care of their daily cleanliness. If ablution had been legislated for this purpose, then it would no longer be necessary before prayer. Indeed, there is no longer any need for prayer itself.

People have often tried to identify the wisdom behind prayer. At times it has been described in terms of a series of exercises which benefit the whole body, and at other times as providing a good training to maintain discipline, in timing, movement and lining up in congregation. Some people have also suggested that it provides a direct relationship with God with what it contains of recitation and supplication. All these may be intended in prayer, but to stress that any of them, or indeed all of them put together are the only reasons behind the requirement of prayer, is to depart from the correct and safe approach.

There were times when some people suggested that we no longer need the physical exercise which prayers provide, since physical exercise has become much more sophisticated. Other people suggested that the army provides a better place and a better system to give everyone the sense of discipline so needed. Another group suggested that there was no need to impose this particular form of prayer, since the relationship with God could be better maintained with a more direct, personal and private communion with Him, which need not be encumbered with physical movement.

In short, if we try to determine the wisdom behind every aspect of worship or piece of legislation, according to a rational analysis or in line with what contemporary science may reveal, stressing always that this is the only reason for it, we move away from the proper method of understanding religious statements and Divine legislation. We, thus, open the way to sophistry and futile argument. In addition, we leave ourselves open to mistakes, especially when our analysis is based on what contemporary science and research reveal, when it is always changing or amending what it used to consider a proven fact.

With respect to the subject we are discussing, namely, *tayammum* or dry ablution, it seems to me that ablution of both types, simple and full, was not ordered simply for the maintenance of cleanliness. Otherwise, the alternative for either type does not serve the same purpose. There must be some other purpose which is served by simple ablution [*wuđū'*], full ablution [*ghusl*] as well as by dry ablution [*tayammum*].

We do not wish to make the same mistake and categorically affirm that our view provides the complete answer. We wish merely to say that perhaps ablution has been ordered as an intermediate step taking us away from our daily preoccupation in order to prepare us psychologically for prayer, which is a great meeting with God. Taken in this light, *tayammum* appears to serve the same purpose as simple or full ablution. Having said that, we realise that God's knowledge is absolute. He knows our inner selves as we do not know them. It behoves us well to learn how to think or speak of God the Almighty and how to view His commandments.

We should also reflect a little on the place of prayer in Islam. We realise that it is so important to attend to prayers, despite any reasons or circumstances which may prevent us from praying. Islam gives us every facility to offer our prayers on time, removing all obstacles that may lie in our way. This is particularly apparent in replacing dry ablution for either or both types of ablution when water is not available or when it is harmful to use, or when the quantity of water available is needed for drinking and other essentials, as well as when we are travelling. Later on in this *sūrah,* we will speak of how prayers are offered in the battlefield, when soldiers fear a treacherous attack by the enemy. All these aspects emphasise how Islam views prayer as a most essential duty, which should not be neglected for any reason. This is again reflected when one is ill and cannot stand up or sit down. Such a person can pray seated, reclining, or lying down. They can even pray by signalling the normal movements with their eyes only, if they cannot move any part of their body.

Prayer is a communion between the Lord and His servants, which He does not like them to sever, because He knows how important it is for them. God does not need the worship of any of His servants. Indeed, their worship benefits them. They feel that prayer helps them discharge their duties, gives them self satisfaction, reassurance and a feeling of happiness as they realise that they have a relationship with God which is suitable for them and which they can maintain. Needless to say, God knows human nature best and He knows what suits it.

Perhaps we should reflect a little on how certain points are expressed in this Qur'ānic verse. Note for example the expression: *"or if one of you has come from the toilet".* The Qur'ānic verse does not say when you do this or that; it simply speaks of coming back from a certain place in order to refer to what a person does there. Moreover, it does not attribute that action to the addressees by saying when you come back from the toilet, but it speaks of "one of you" coming back. This is a fine touch, which provides us with an example of how to speak about such situations.

Similarly, the expression "or if you have touched women" refers to the physical relationship between man and woman. It is more in keeping with the Islamic standards of propriety to use such an expression. Touching a woman may be a preliminary step to, or an expression of, the action itself. In either case, we have an

example of how such matters should be referred to in conversation when propriety is observed.

Again, pure dust is described as "good" dust, suggesting that what is pure is good and what is impure is evil. Again, the expression is most effective, a fine touch. Praise be to the Lord, our Creator who knows our human nature best.

5
Battle Resumed

Are you not aware of those who, having been granted a share of Divine revelations, now barter it away for error, and want you too to lose your way. (44)

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ نَصِيبٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ
يَشۡتَرُونَ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن تَضِلُّواْ
ٱلسَّبِيلَ ٤٤

But God knows best who are your enemies. God is sufficient for you as a patron, and God is sufficient to give succour. (45)

وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِأَعۡدَآئِكُمۡۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَلِيّٗا
وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ نَصِيرٗا ٤٥

Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who take (revealed) words out of their context and say: "We have heard, but we disobey" and, "Hear; may you be bereft of hearing," and, "Hearken to us." Thus they distort the phrases with their tongues and imply that the true faith is false. Had they but said: "We have heard and we pay heed," and "Hear us and have patience with us," it would have been for their own good and more proper. God has rejected them for their disbelief. It is only a few of them that believe. (46)

مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ يُحَرِّفُونَ ٱلۡكَلِمَ عَن
مَّوَاضِعِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ سَمِعۡنَا وَعَصَيۡنَا
وَٱسۡمَعۡ غَيۡرَ مُسۡمَعٖ وَرَٰعِنَا لَيَّۢا بِأَلۡسِنَتِهِمۡ
وَطَعۡنٗا فِي ٱلدِّينِۚ وَلَوۡ أَنَّهُمۡ قَالُواْ سَمِعۡنَا
وَأَطَعۡنَا وَٱسۡمَعۡ وَٱنظُرۡنَا لَكَانَ خَيۡرٗا لَّهُمۡ
وَأَقۡوَمَ وَلَٰكِن لَّعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُفۡرِهِمۡ فَلَا
يُؤۡمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ٤٦

O you who have been given revelations! Believe in what We have bestowed from on high confirming that which you already have, lest We obliterate faces and turn them backward, or We reject them as We rejected the Sabbath-breakers: for God's will is always done. (47)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ ءَامِنُواْ بِمَا نَزَّلۡنَا
مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا مَعَكُم مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن نَّطۡمِسَ
وُجُوهٗا فَنَرُدَّهَا عَلَىٰٓ أَدۡبَٰرِهَآ أَوۡ نَلۡعَنَهُمۡ
كَمَا لَعَنَّآ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلسَّبۡتِۚ وَكَانَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ
مَفۡعُولًا ٤٧

God will never forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God indeed contrived an awesome sin. (48)

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغۡفِرُ أَن يُشۡرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغۡفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُۚ وَمَن يُشۡرِكۡ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱفۡتَرَىٰٓ إِثۡمًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٤٨﴾

Are you aware of those who consider themselves pure? It is indeed God who causes whom He wills to grow in purity. None shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. (49)

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُزَكُّونَ أَنفُسَهُمۚ بَلِ ٱللَّهُ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَآءُ وَلَا يُظۡلَمُونَ فَتِيلاً ﴿٤٩﴾

Behold how they fabricate lies against God. This is enough as an obvious sin [for anyone]. (50)

ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ يَفۡتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡكَذِبَۖ وَكَفَىٰ بِهِۦٓ إِثۡمًا مُّبِينًا ﴿٥٠﴾

Are you not aware of those who, having been granted a share of Divine revelations, now believe in falsehood and arrogant deviation [from Divine faith], and they say to the unbelievers that they are better guided than the believers. (51)

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ نَصِيبًا مِّنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡجِبۡتِ وَٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ أَهۡدَىٰ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ سَبِيلاً ﴿٥١﴾

These are the ones whom God has rejected; anyone whom God rejects shall find none to succour him. (52)

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ وَمَن يَلۡعَنِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ نَصِيرًا ﴿٥٢﴾

Have they, perchance, a share in (God's) dominion? If so, they would not give other people so much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. (53)

أَمۡ لَهُمۡ نَصِيبٌ مِّنَ ٱلۡمُلۡكِ فَإِذًا لَّا يُؤۡتُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ نَقِيرًا ﴿٥٣﴾

Do they, perchance, envy other people for what God has given them out of His bounty? We have indeed given revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion. (54)

أَمۡ يَحۡسُدُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ عَلَىٰ مَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۖ فَقَدۡ ءَاتَيۡنَآ ءَالَ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةَ وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُم مُّلۡكًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٥٤﴾

فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ ءَامَنَ بِهِۦ وَمِنْهُم مَّن صَدَّ عَنْهُ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِجَهَنَّمَ سَعِيرًا ﴿٥٥﴾

Some of them believe in him and some turn away from him. Sufficient scourge is the fire of Hell. (55)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا سَوْفَ نُصْلِيهِمْ نَارًا كُلَّمَا نَضِجَتْ جُلُودُهُم بَدَّلْنَـٰهُمْ جُلُودًا غَيْرَهَا لِيَذُوقُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٥٦﴾

Those who disbelieve in Our revelations We shall, in time, cause them to endure fire: every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]. God is indeed Almighty, Wise. (56)

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّـٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ خَـٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۖ لَّهُمْ فِيهَآ أَزْوَٰجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَنُدْخِلُهُمْ ظِلًّا ظَلِيلًا ﴿٥٧﴾

but those who believe and do righteous deeds We shall admit into gardens through which running waters flow, where they shall abide beyond the count of time. There they shall have pure spouses, and We shall admit them into a cool, dense shade. (57)

Overview

The passages of this *sūrah* which we have discussed so far dealt exclusively with the organisation of Islamic society, speaking about marriage, taking care of orphans, inheritance and other relevant matters. Beginning with this passage the *sūrah* turns to a different subject, providing guidance to the Muslim community on how to face its enemies. We have already spoken about this fight when we commented on the two preceding *Sūrahs,* 2, The Cow, or *Al-Baqarah,* and 3, The House of `Imrān, or Āl *`Imrān.*

The *sūrah* now changes emphasis so as to speak mainly about the external battle the Muslim community had and has to fight against surrounding, hostile communities. The battle, however, does not begin at this particular point. All that has passed in the *sūrah* of social, economic, and family legislation, and all the moral values which have been established and the traces of *ignorance* eradicated so that the Muslim community acquires its distinctive Islamic features are all relevant to the external battle against that community's enemies. Whether these enemies be in Madinah in particular or in Arabia generally, all was given in preparation for this battle. This legislation and these values represent a sustained campaign to lay down the foundations of the new society on the basis of Islam so that it may be able to face

up to its enemies and overcome them.

As we have seen in the preceding two *sūrahs,* priority is given to the building of the internal structure of the Muslim community, its faith, concepts, moral values, laws and systems. The Muslim community is also given a full briefing on the nature of its enemies, their methods, designs, and schemes. The believers are sent into the battle with reassurance, open eyes, and a strong will, as well as full knowledge of the nature of both the battle ahead and their enemies. All these features are true of this *sūrah* as well.

Throughout, the Qur'ān directs the battle on all fronts. In feelings and consciousness, the Qur'ān establishes a new faith based on a new concept of God, the Lord, the Creator, and on a new concept of existence. It provides new values and standards, purifies human nature of all traces of ignorance, eradicates these traces from society, and substitutes them with distinctive Islamic features. When it has done that, the Qur'ān provides guidance to the Muslim community on how to engage its internal and external enemies, be they Jews, hypocrites or idolaters. There need be no anxiety about the outcome of the battle since the Muslim community has undertaken all preparations to meet and overcome its enemies. It is fully confident of the strength of its inner structure, faith, morality and social system.

The essential superiority of the Muslim community to all surrounding ignorant communities, including that of the Jews in Madinah itself, was spiritual, moral and social. It never was a military, economic or material superiority. Indeed, it was always the enemies of Islam who outnumbered the Muslims, who were better equipped, and who enjoyed greater material resources, whether in the Arabian peninsula itself or beyond. The superiority of the Muslim community was simply in what Islam had given it through its unique system.

Enjoying this particular type of superiority, which naturally gave the Muslim community a far more competent leadership, Islam was able to crush ignorance, first in Arabia and then in the two superpowers represented by the Empires of Byzantium and Persia. It was then able to carry its message well beyond these territories, having sometimes to rely on military power while at other times, relying exclusively on the Qur'ān.

Without such great superiority, the miracle, which has no parallel in history, not even in the remarkable conquests of the Tartars in ancient history and the Nazi armies in recent days, could not have been accomplished. Islamic conquests were not military ones. They represented a conquest of faith, culture and civilisation. Without having any recourse to compulsion, the people of the conquered lands, or should we say, liberated ones, adopted the faith, language and traditions of Islam. That makes Islamic conquest unique in history.

It was a complete human victory representing a new birth of humanity. It ushered in the birth of a new man who was totally unknown on earth. It imparted its colour and character to the areas where Muslims lived. The Islamic tide was, thus, able to obliterate all traces of former civilisations which had survived for long centuries in certain areas, such as the Pharaonic in Egypt, the Assyrian and Babylonian in Iraq and the Phoenician in Syria. It could only do so because it stretches its roots far deeper in human nature and deals with man as a whole, uniquely moulding human life.

The adoption of the Islamic language such that it became the native language of these countries is a remarkable phenomenon, one that has not been adequately studied. In my view, it is more remarkable than the adoption of the Islamic faith by the local population. Language is so deeply rooted in man's constitution and so thoroughly intertwined with social life that it is impossible for it to change completely except through a perfect miracle. The Arabic language, itself, is not responsible for this, for Arabic had been spoken for centuries. Nor could it perform any miracle of this sort prior to the advent of Islam. It is for this reason that I have called it the "Islamic language". The new strength Arabic acquired to enable it to accomplish this miracle was certainly derived from Islam.

All talents available in the areas liberated through Islamic conquest began to express themselves in the new language of the new faith, i.e. the Islamic language. In every field of specialisation, these talents have made a remarkable and original contribution. It has never suffered from the constraints familiar when a talented person gives expression to that talent in a language other than his mother tongue. What this means is that the Islamic language has become the mother tongue of all these talents. The essential point is that this language gave those people a cultural fund so close to human nature that they could identify themselves with it more than with their old cultures and old languages.

This cultural fund was nothing less than the new faith and the spiritual, moral and social structure the Islamic way of life established; all within a very short period. It was a great structure, which fitted in perfectly with human nature and which imparted an irresistible force to the language of Islam, in the same way as it imparted an irresistible power to Islamic armies.

This is the only explanation that can be given to that remarkable phenomenon which is unique in history. This is a subject that merits discussion at greater length. What has been said, however, should be sufficient within the context of this commentary.

The present passage begins a portion of the *sūrah* giving numerous directives to the Muslim community on how to conduct its fight against those enemy camps who

continuously schemed against the newly-established Muslim community in Madinah. At first, our attentions are drawn to the attitude of the Jews and what steps they took against the new faith and the community advocating it. This is followed by a passage explaining the role of the Muslim community, the nature of its constitution, and the requirement of accepting the faith upon which its whole existence is built. This is then followed by a passage calling on this community to defend its constitution and very existence, warning it against the scheming of hypocrites who had crept into its ranks. The same passage also explains the nature of life and death, which are determined by God. All this is part of the education the Muslim community receives in order to prepare it to fulfil its role and succeed against its enemies.

More about the hypocrites is given in the passage that follows. Here, a warning is given to the Muslim community against defending the actions or taking a different attitude towards the hypocrites. Then follows an explanation of the measures the Muslim community should take in order to regulate its relations with other states and communities. In effect, this lays down the foundation of the Islamic law of international relations.

Another passage provides an example of the unique Islamic standard, explaining how a single Jew should be treated by the Islamic society. A whole passage deals with idolatry, showing how weak the foundations of pagan society in Arabia were. In the midst of all these directives for the battle ahead, we have brief references to the internal organisation of Islamic society. These are closely associated with the earlier passages in the *sūrah* devoted to the organisation of the Muslim family. Then follows a passage denouncing hypocrisy and the hypocrites, relegating them to the lowest grade in Hell.

Taken together, these brief references reveal to us the multi-sided nature of the battle a Muslim community has to face, internally and externally. It also shows that the internal and the external battles in the life of the first Muslim community grew, of their very nature, side by side and were mutually interdependent. The same applies to the challenge every Muslim community has to face at all times.

Error Multiplied

> *Are you not aware of those who, having been granted a share of Divine revelations, now barter it away for error, and want you too to lose your way. But God knows best who are your enemies. God is sufficient for you as a patron, and God is sufficient to give succour. Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who take (revealed) words out of their context and say: "We have heard, but we disobey" and, "Hear; may you be bereft of hearing," and, "Hearken to us." Thus they distort the phrases with*

> *their tongues and imply that the true faith is false. Had they but said: "We have heard and we pay heed," and "Hear us and have patience with us, " it would have been for their own good and more proper. God has rejected them for their disbelief. It is only a few of them that believe.* (Verses 44-46)

This is the first in a long series of statements which wonder at the attitude taken by the Jews. It is addressed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and to everyone who witnesses this singular stance. Since they have been given a portion of the Scriptures, namely the Torah, which was conveyed to them by God's Messenger, Moses, it should have given them guidance, steering them away from their erroneous ways. They claim this portion and what it entails of Divine guidance, but they, nevertheless, barter it away for error. Use of the phrase, "barter it away for", or more literally, "purchase" is very significant, because it implies an action taken after deliberation. They have guidance that they ignore and, hence, they prefer to he in error. The deal does not come as a result of ignorance or by mistake, but it is knowingly concluded. This is highly singular. Hence, the Qur'ān wonders at their attitude.

They do not, however, stop at that. They want that the Muslims who follow Divine guidance go astray, and they employ all means and devices to achieve that end. They try to obscure every source of guidance so that no one can follow the right way. In both respects, a warning is given to the Muslims against the Jews' schemes. The Muslims cherished the fact that they had received guidance from God, were proud of following that guidance, and, hence, were naturally hostile to anyone who sought to force them back into past *ignorance.* They were aware of both outlooks but now loved Islam and hated *ignorance.* It is not surprising, therefore, that they took a strong view against anyone who tried to lead them away from guidance into error. God certainly knew their feelings and addressed them in this way, revealing to them the Jews' intentions and designs. The Qur'ān, then, expressly brands the Jews as enemies of the Muslims and reassures the Muslim community that it will receive help from its Patron who is none other than God: *"But God knows best who are your enemies. God is sufficient for you as a patron, and God is sufficient to give succour."* (Verse 45)

Distortion of God's Words

At first, the wondering question is phrased in a way which means the people of the Scriptures in general. It is understood that those who were directly meant by this were the Jews of Madinah. Now the Qur'ān specifies the Jews and describes their rude behaviour towards the Prophet in the early years of his settlement in Madinah, before they were finally subdued: *"Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who*

take (revealed) words out of their context and say: 'We have heard, but we disobey' and, 'Hear; may you be bereft of hearing,' and, 'Hearken to us.' Thus they distort the phrases with their tongues and imply that the true faith is false." (Verse 46)

They have been so impudent and rude that they even distort revealed statements. Most probably, this is a reference to their different interpretation of statements given in the Torah from how they were actually intended. They did this in order to deny every reference to the final, Divine message and to remove every piece of legislation endorsed by the Qur'ān, God's final revelation. Obviously, when the same legislation is given in both Scriptures, this is evidence of their common source, and, consequently, it is evidence emphasising the truthfulness of Muĥammad's message. Distortion of religious statements so that they may be brought in line with people's desires is a phenomenon common to any group of clergy who lose their way and who look at their religious knowledge as a profession in the service of the powerful, and who try at the same time to appease those elements of the masses wishing to release themselves from the discipline of religion. Perhaps the Jews excel all other people in this respect, although we have seen in our time some Muslims who take their religious knowledge as a profession. Indeed, some of these can compete favourably with the Jews.

Their rudeness towards the Prophet went so far that they said to him bluntly: "We hear what you say, Muĥammad! But we disobey it. We are not prepared to believe in you or follow you." Again, this is an indication that these verses were revealed in the early period in Madinah. At that time, the Jews might have been so rude and offensive in their attitude to the Prophet. This is coupled with their bad manners and sly methods. They expressed themselves in a superficially polite way to the Prophet. Ostensibly, they said: "Hear, and no one may order you to hear, (this is a polite manner of speech), and be considerate to us," taking account of our status. It is as though they wanted to say that since they had Divine revelations, they need not be called upon to embrace Islam in the same way as the idolaters were called on to believe in it. But they did not say these words in a straightforward manner. They twisted their words to distort their meaning, implying: *"Hear; may you be bereft of hearing."* The other phrase mentioned in the Qur'ānic verse, *"Have patience with us"*, they distorted so as to describe the Prophet as rash. Thus they combined impudence with slyness and distortion of God's revelations. This is typical of the Israelite nature.

The text then outlines that attitude which is worthy of people given Divine revelations. It assures them that they may still be rightly guided and generously rewarded if they would but only believe. But then their true nature is revealed: *"Had they but said: 'We have heard and we pay heed,' and Hear us and have patience with us,' it would have been for their own good and more proper. God has rejected them for their disbelief. It is only a few of them that believe."* (Verse 46)

Their problem is that they do not face up to the truth frankly and objectively. Had they done so and spoken in a straightforward manner, meaning what they said, it would have been far better for them and more appropriate for their situation. The truth of the matter is that because of their disbelief, they are rejected, outcast. Only a few of them ever accept the true faith.

God always says the truth. In the long history of Islam, only a very small number of Jews believed in it. These were people whom God rewarded their hard work in pursuit of what pleases Him by guiding them to the true faith. Otherwise, the overwhelming majority of Jews continued to be hostile to Islam and the Muslims for more than fourteen centuries. Their hostility started with Islam establishing its base so close to them in Madinah. Not once did they stop their multifarious scheming against Islam, and with a determination that never weakened. No one has ever worked against Islam during any period of its history, including the Crusades and all forms of colonialism, without having had some help and encouragement from the Jews.

A Warning Not to Be Ignored

These two verses represent a call made to the people of the Scriptures, particularly the Jews, to believe in the Book, which has been sent down confirming what is already in their hands. This is coupled with a warning against their being misshaped and cursed, which can only be expected if they continue in their obstinate rejection of the new Divine faith and in their scheming against it. They are branded as deviant from the faith in the absolute oneness of God, which is also the essence of their faith. God never forgives associating partners with Him. At the same time, the broad scope of God's forgiveness is outlined. Thus, the enormity of associating other deities with God is delineated in sharp relief.

> *0 you who have been given revelations! Believe in what We have bestowed from on high confirming that which you already have, lest We obliterate faces and turn them backward, or We reject them as We rejected the Sabbath-breakers: for God's will is always done. God will never forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God indeed contrived an awesome sin.* (Verses 47-48)

They are addressed by the quality which should have made them the first to respond favourably to Islam: *"O you who have been given revelations! Believe in what We have bestowed from on high confirming that which you already have."* (Verse 47) Since they had received revelations, it was no strange thing to them that Divine guidance should be given. The One who has given them those Scriptures is now calling upon

them to believe in a message which confirms their own. If this were sufficient to provide a clear proof or strong argument to accept the faith, the Jews should have been the first to embrace it. But they had their own interests, ambitions, grudges and hatreds. Moreover, they themselves were deviant. They are described in the Torah as a "stiff-necked people". Hence, they rejected the faith and they deserved the stern warning: *"Believe... lest We obliterate faces and turn them backwards, or We reject them as We rejected the Sabbath-breakers: for God's will is always done."* (Verse 47)

The obliteration of faces means the effacing of their distinctive human features. Turning them backward means causing them to walk backwards. This threat could be intended literally, which means that they could lose their human appearance and proper judgement. It could mean something similar to the curse put on the Sabbath breakers, who devised a subtle method to catch fish on the day of the Sabbath, despite its strict prohibition. They were actually transformed into monkeys and pigs. On the other hand, the warning could mean to obliterate the distinctive elements of proper insight and true guidance in their minds causing them to sink back into disbelief, i.e. to the state they were in before the Scriptures were given to them. To disbelieve after having been given guidance is, indeed, to have faces obliterated and to retreat backwards. Whichever meaning is intended, this response to the Jews' obstinate and wicked nature is very stern. One of the few who heeded this warning was a man who had previously earned the title "Ka`b al-Ahbār". He embraced Islam. According to a report related by Abū Ĥātim on the authority of Abū Idrīs (Aidhullāh al-Khaulānī, Ka`b's teacher, Abū Muslim al-Khalīlī used to take Ka`b to task for his slow response to God's Messenger (peace be upon him). He once sent him to the Prophet to make sure that he was the Prophet to which reference is made in the Jewish sacred books. Ka`b says: "I rode to Madinah where I heard someone reciting from the Qur'ān the verse which says: *"O you who have been given revelations! Believe in what We have bestowed from on high confirming that which you already have, lest We obliterate faces and turn them backwards."* I went straight and had a bath, feeling my face with my hands, fearing that it would be obliterated. I then embraced Islam."[12]

The warning is followed by a comment stressing its seriousness. This is done in such a way as to take the Jewish nature into account: *"God's will is always done."*

Next comes a comment delivering another warning in respect of the Hereafter. This new warning excludes any possibility of forgiveness to anyone who associates partners with God. At the same time, Divine mercy is shown to be greater than all other sins: *"God will never forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God indeed contrived an*

[12] It should be mentioned here that there is another report which suggests that Ka`b embraced Islam much later, during the reign of `Umar ibn al-Khaţţāb. This report, which may be more accurate, also makes his adoption of Islam the result of listening to this verse.

awesome sin." (Verse 48) This verse is stated in a context that implies an express accusation against the Jews for associating partners with God. Hence, they are called upon to return to the pure faith in His Oneness.

Nothing is mentioned here about what they said or did to brand them as polytheists. Details of that are given elsewhere. The Qur'ān reports that they claimed that *"Ezra is the son of God".* (9: 30) Such a statement was made in the same vein as that of the Christians who claimed that *"the Christ is the son of God".* (9: 30) Any statement of this type constitutes an act of associating partners with God. The Qur'ān also reports that both Christians and Jews *"have taken their rabbis and priests as lords alongside God'.* (9: 31) It has to be said that neither group used to worship rabbis or priests. They simply acknowledged their right to legislate for them, and to make certain things lawful and to forbid others. The authority to do that belongs exclusively to God. It is one of the most essential elements of Godhead. Hence, the Qur'ān classifies them among the polytheists. This is particularly significant in light of the Islamic concept as to who constitutes a Muslim and who a believer. This point will be elaborated upon further in the commentary on the rest of this *sūrah.*

At any rate, the Jews of Arabia at the time when Islam was revealed had had their faith adulterated with polytheistic elements. Hence, they are expressly warned here that God may forgive, as He pleases, anyone whatever sin he may have committed, other than associating partners with Him. No forgiveness is granted to any person who ends his life believing in other gods alongside God, without having repented for holding such an erroneous belief.

When a person associates partners with God, he actually severs all his relations with the Lord and Creator. Hence, there is no hope that he may be forgiven if this state of a total break of relations is maintained until his death. Anyone who maintains such an attitude until death, ignoring all the pointers to God's oneness — in the form of clear proofs throughout the universe, and in the guidance given by prophets and messengers — is devoid of all goodness. Such a persistent denial of God's oneness is proof of total, incurable corruption of human nature, sending it to a lowly depth from which it cannot rise. Such a person has already prepared himself for the life of Hell.

Apart from this extremely grave sin and this flagrant injustice, God forgives all sins, great or small. All these sins, including cardinal ones, may be forgiven, according to God's will, whether one repents or not as some reports tell, as long as the person who commits them believes in God, hopes to be forgiven, believes that God is able to forgive him and that God's forgiveness is greater than his sins. This shows that God's mercy is without limit, inexhaustible, and may be granted to all and sundry. God's forgiveness is open to all. We need only to seek it.

This principle is supported by numerous *aĥādīth* and reports about the Prophet. Let us consider the following examples.

> Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim quote Abū Dharr, a Companion of the Prophet, as saying: "I went out one night only to find God's Messenger walking alone, having none for company. I thought that he did not wish anyone to walk with him. I, therefore, walked in the shade, away from the light thrown by the moon. Seeing me on turning round, he asked: 'Who is it?' I said: 'It is Abū Dharr, may God take my life to protect yours.' He said: 'Come forward, Abū Dharr.' I walked with him for some time and he said to me: 'Those who are given plenty are the ones who will have only very little on the Day of Judgement, except for one who has been given wealth by God and he gave in charity on his right and left, in front of him and behind him, and used it for what is beneficial.' We then walked for some time, before he said to me: 'Sit down here.' He made me sit in a low spot with plenty of stones. He said: 'Sit down here until I come back to you.' He walked in the rocky, open area until I could see him no more. He stayed a long time. I then heard him talking as he came back. He said: 'Even if he commits adultery and theft.' When he arrived, I could no longer resist the temptation. I, therefore, said to him: 'Prophet, may God take my life to protect yours! To whom were you talking in the rocky open space? I thought I heard someone answering you.' He said: 'That was Gabriel, the Angel, who met me over there. He said: "Give to your followers the happy news that anyone who dies without associating any partners with God, shall be admitted to Heaven." I said: 'Gabriel, even if he commits theft and adultery?' He answered: 'Yes'. I said: 'Even if he steals and commits adultery?' He answered: 'Yes, indeed. And even if he drinks intoxicants.'"
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> Jābir ibn `Abdullāh, a Companion of the Prophet quotes him as saying: "Any soul who dies associating no partners with God may benefit by His forgiveness. God may punish him if He pleases and may forgive him if He pleases. "*God will never forgive that partners are associated with Him. He may forgive any lesser sin to whomever He wills.*" (Related by Ibn Abī Ĥātim.)
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> `Abdullāh ibn `Umar, a learned Companion of the Prophet says: "We, the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) used to be in no doubt that forgiveness could not be extended to a murderer, or one who robs an orphan of his money or one who knowingly accuses a chaste woman of adultery, or one who is guilty of perjury. The verse was then revealed which states: `*God will never forgive that partners be associated with Him. He may forgive any lesser sin to whomever He wills.*' The Prophet's Companions then stopped making such statements." (Related by Ibn Abī Ĥātim.)

> Ibn `Abbās quotes the Prophet as saying: "God says: He who knows that I am able to forgive sins shall he forgiven by Me and I do not care what offences he may have committed, as long as he has not associated any partners with Me." (Related by al-Ṭabarānī.)

This last *ĥadīth* is particularly significant. What is important is to have a proper awareness of God's true nature. Such an awareness gives rise to a genuine desire to do good as well as feelings of hope, fear and being ashamed of one's faults. If an offence is committed, such feelings help one mend one's ways and bring one nearer to forgiveness.

Fabricating Lies against God

As the Qur'ān directs the battle of the Muslim community against the Jews in Madinah, it wonders at those who claim that they are God's chosen people. They further claim to be pure, yet they continue to distort God's words and take an impudent attitude towards God and His Messenger, and believe in false deities. They, thus, assert false claims against God as they allege that they are close to Him regardless of the magnitude of their bad deeds. *"Are you aware of those who consider themselves pure? It is indeed God who causes whom He wills to grow in purity. None shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Behold how they fabricate lies against God. This is enough as an obvious sin [for anyone]."* (Verses 49-50)

That the Jews are God's chosen people is an age-old claim asserted by them. God has indeed chosen them to be the bearers of His message to the rest of mankind, giving them at the time a distinguished position above all other nations. He destroyed Pharaoh and his people for their sake and allowed them to take over the sacred land. They, however, deviated from the path God has chosen for them and spread much corruption in the land, perpetrating every evil. Their rabbis made lawful for them what God had forbidden and forbade them what God had made lawful. The people followed them making no objection to their effective claim to Godhead, which they were stating by virtue of their making such legislation. The rabbis changed God's law in order to appease the people in power and to satisfy the desires of the masses. When they followed their rabbis, the people effectively considered them as lords, alongside God.

They also devoured usury, and weakened their relationship with God's faith and the Scriptures He revealed to them. Despite all this and much more, they continued to claim that they were God's children and beloved ones. They also claimed that they would not be touched by the fire of Hell except for a few days. They further claimed that none follows proper guidance and none may be well received by God except the Jews. They, thus, depicted the whole question as one of affinity to God and

favouritism by Him. Far be it from God to do that! There is no blood relation or affinity between God and any of His creation. The only relationship He may have with them is that established by adopting the true faith, doing what is good and maintaining the system He approves of. Anyone who deviates from this incurs God's displeasure. God is particularly displeased with people to whom He gives true guidance and who deliberately turn away from it.

The case of the Jews is the same as those who nowadays claim to be Muslims, of those who think that they belong to the nation of the followers of Muĥammad (peace be upon him) and believe that God will undoubtedly give them victory to liberate their land from the Jews. This, while they totally abandon the code of living God has given to them in the shape of religion. They banish it totally from their lives, giving God's revelation no say in their legal, economic, and social systems, and denying it the right to set for them their moral values and traditions. They have nothing of Islam but their Muslim names and the fact that they have been born in a land which was once inhabited by Muslims who implemented Divine guidance and who followed the Islamic way of life. God invites His Messenger to wonder at those Jews who continuously claimed to be pure. The situation of contemporary Muslims is an even worse spectacle to wonder at.

It is not up to human beings to consider themselves pure and to testify to their own goodness and closeness to God. It is God who causes anyone He wills to grow in purity. He knows all hearts and intentions. He will never wrong anyone in any way, provided that they leave it up to Him to purify whom He wills while they themselves move to do what is required of them, not merely to supplicate. If they do such works quietly, maintaining humility and without any boastfulness, they will never be wronged by God. He does not forget anything they do. *"Are you aware of those who consider themselves pure? It is indeed God who causes whom He wills to grow in purity. None shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth."* (Verse 49)

God testifies that when the Jews claim purity for themselves and assert that God is pleased with them, they are actually fabricating lies against Him. He denounces what they do in no ambiguous terms: *"Behold how they fabricate lies against God. This is enough as an obvious sin [for anyone]."* (Verse 50)

When we claim to be Muslims simply because we have Muslim names and live in a land which was inhabited by Muslims, while at the same time we do not implement Islam in any aspect of our lives, we actually give a testimony against Islam. When we claim that God has chosen us because we are the nation of Muĥammad (peace be upon him) while at the same time we abandon Muĥammad's faith and the system he has given us to implement in our lives, we are actually in the same position which God warns us against.

The faith given to us by God provides us with a complete way of life. To obey God is to implement this way of life. To draw closer to God can only be achieved through obeying Him. Let us now reflect on our position towards God and His faith. Let us then consider any similarity or dissimilarity between our situation and that of those Jews whom God denounces as fabricating lies against Him when they claim purity for themselves. The same rule applies to both communities, and the situations are particularly similar. No one may claim to have any blood or marriage relationship with God, and no one may claim to be given special favours by Him.

Taking Pride in False Beliefs

The *sūrah* continues to draw people's attention to the singular attitude of those who claim to be pure, while they believe in falsehood and in arbitrary deviation away from Divine guidance. At the same time, they testify that the pagan Arabs were better guided than those who believed in God, His message, and the Divine constitution. This is followed by an outright denunciation of these people and their attitude. They are shown as envious and stingy. The true reason for their opposition to Islam which marks their deviation from the faith of Abraham, in belonging to which they took pride, is given together with a clear warning to them that persistence in such an attitude will inevitably lead to Hell.

> *Are you not aware of those who, having been granted a share of Divine revelations, now believe in falsehood and arrogant deviation [from Divine faith], and they say to the unbelievers that they are better guided than the believers. These are the ones whom God has rejected; anyone whom God rejects shall find none to succour him. Have they, perchance, a share in (God's) dominion? If so, they would not give other people so much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. Do they, perchance, envy other people fir what God has given them out of His bounty? We have indeed given revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion. Some of them believe in him and some turn away from him. Sufficient scourge is the fire of Hell.* (Verses 51-55)

Those who were given a portion of the Scriptures should have been the first to believe in God's new revelations and to reject the idolatry advocated by those who received no guidance from God. They are always expected to put God's revelations into practice and to implement them in their lives. They must not follow arrogant, arbitrary deviation, which includes every rule or law that cannot be supported by Divine faith. The Jews, who used to claim purity for themselves and boast that they were God's beloved people, followed falsehood, nevertheless, and were guilty of associating partners with God when they allowed their priests and rabbis to enact for them legislation which could not be sanctioned by Him. Laws which are in conflict

with Divine faith are described here as arrogant, as arbitrary deviations because they involve the usurpation by man of one of the most essential elements of Godhead, namely legislative authority. Moreover, it signifies rebellion against Divine law, which ensures that man abides by the rule of right and justice. Those who believe in such falsehood and follow such arbitrary and arrogant deviation are either unbelievers or idolaters. Hence, the Qur'ān wonders at them having been given a part of the Scriptures for they knowingly deviate from it.

Furthermore, they sided with the pagan idolaters against the believers who were given revelations by God: "*And they say to the unbelievers that they are better guided than the believers.*" (Verse 51)

Ibn Isĥāq reports on the authority of Ibn `Abbās, the Prophet's cousin and Companion: "Those who worked to forge the alliance between the confederate Arab tribes of Quraysh and Ghatafān and the Jewish tribe of Quraiżah were Ĥuyay ibn Akhțab, Sallām ibn al-Ĥaqīq Abū Rāfi`, al-Rabī` ibn al-Ĥaqīq, Abū `Āmir, Waĥwāĥ ibn `Amir, and Ĥawdah ibn Qays. The last three were of the Jewish tribe of Wā'il, while the rest belonged to the Jewish tribe of al-Nađīr. When they went to the Quraysh, the latter thought: `These are the Jewish rabbis who have knowledge of the Old Testament. Let us ask them which religion is better, ours or that of Muĥammad.' When they asked them they said: `Your religion is better than his, and you are better guided than his followers."' God then revealed the following verses:

> *Are you not aware of those who, having been granted a share of Divine revelations, now believe in falsehood and arrogant deviation [from Divine faith], and they say to the unbelievers that they are better guided than the believers. These are the ones whom God has rejected; anyone whom God rejects shall find none to succour him. Have they, perchance, a share in (God's) dominion? If so, they would not give other people so much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. Do they, perchance, envy other people for what God has given them out of His bounty? We have indeed given revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion. Some of them believe in him and some turn away from him. Sufficient scourge is the fire of Hell.* (Verses 51-55)

This is in effect a declaration that they have been rejected by God and that they will have no support in this life or in the Hereafter, because they had gone to the idolaters seeking their support. They told them what they knew to be untrue in order to win their support. They achieved their purpose and the Arabian tribes came out with them for the Battle of the Moat. The Prophet and his Companions dug the Moat around Madinah, and God took care of their enemies: "*God repelled the unbelievers and caused them to go back frustrated, having achieved nothing. God has spared the believers the need to fight, for God is Mighty, Powerful.*" (33: 25)

It is singular that the Jews should say that idolatry was better than the faith of Muĥammad and his Companions, and to claim that the idolaters were better guided than those who had believed in the Divine Book and in God's Messenger. Nevertheless, it is a consistent attitude displayed by the Jews, who have always opposed the truth and supported the followers of falsehood against them. They have their own insatiable ambition and ever-burning grudges. Those who follow the truth will never support them to achieve these ambitions or avenge these grudges. They can only be supported by those who follow falsehood. For this reason, they have to compromise with the latter and to testify in their favour.

This is a permanent state of affairs which makes it logical for them to describe the unbelievers as better guided than those who believe in God's oneness. They repeat the same statement today and will repeat it in the future. They manipulate all the media under their control in order to distort the image of every successful Islamic movement anywhere in the world. They rush to aid the people of falsehood in destroying any Islamic movement, exactly as they helped the pagans of the Quraysh. Here too they sought their support to distort the image of the first Islamic movement and to destroy it. Their cunning and the circumstances which prevail nowadays, however, sometimes make them refrain from openly praising the people of falsehood. They continue, however, to distort the image of the truth and undermine its followers in order to facilitate their destruction by their enemies.

They realise that their open praise of their secret allies may create suspicion concerning the latter's motives, who try to crush Islamic movements throughout the world. Devious as they are, they take at times an ostensibly hostile attitude towards their own allies, who are engaged in a fight against the truth and its people. They may appear to be engaged in a war against their allies, but it is only a war of words, the aim of which is to dispel any doubt that may be raised about those who are, in reality, their best allies. But they never stop working hard to distort the image of Islam and its followers. Their grudges and hostilities towards Islam and towards any attempt to bring about any Islamic revival is too great to be kept secret, even for deceiving their enemies.

It is the same nature and the same tactics employed for the same aim. It is for this that God curses them and ensures that they shall have no one to support them. He who is not supported by God has no support whatsoever, even though all the people of the world may be on his side: *"These are the ones whom God has rejected; anyone whom God rejects shall find none to succour him."* (Verse 52)

We may be overawed when we say that all Western countries are supporting the Israelis. This may prompt us to ask: What about God's promise that He has rejected them and, as such, that they will have no support? True support comes from God, not from people and states, even though they may have hydrogen bombs and

missiles to deliver them. It is God alone who has mastery over His servants, including those who own hydrogen bombs and missiles. God supports those who support Him. He helps those who truly believe in Him, and follow His method closely, implementing it willingly, feeling happy, reassured.

With these words, God is addressing a community which believes in Him, and who follow His constitution. He belittles the importance of the Jews and their supporters and promises the Muslims that they will succeed in their battle against them. God has fulfilled His promises, which apply only to those who truly believe in Him. It is accomplished only by genuine and true believers. Let us, then, not be frightened by the support given by the atheists, polytheists and crusaders to the Jews. For these have only supported them against Islam. This is not the real support. At the same time, we must not be deceived by the present state of affairs. God's promise to the Muslims will undoubtedly come true, when they are truly Muslims. Let Muslims try once only to be true Muslims, and let them see for themselves whether the Jews will continue to have any supporters, or whether they will benefit in any way by such support.

The Nature of Envy

The next two verses denounce their opposition to the Prophet and Muslims generally, begrudging them God's favours of revelations, victory and strength. They envy them what God has granted them of His grace. They have not given them anything of their own. They view as undeserved, any favour God grants to anyone other than themselves, although He has bestowed on them and their predecessors much of His grace. His bounty has not taught them to be generous, and has not rid them of their envy. *"Have they, perchance, a share in (God's) dominion? If so, they would not give other people so much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. Do they, perchance, envy other people for what God has given them out of His bounty? We have indeed given revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion."* (Verses 53-54)

This is an amazing attitude. They cannot tolerate that God grants any of His servants any favour. Are they His partners? Glorified be He to take any partners. Do they have any share in His wealth and property, from which He bestows His gifts? Had they any such share, they would have not given anyone a trifle. The Arabic expression used here for "a trifle" is a term which signifies a little mark which may be seen at the back of a date-stone or its groove. The Israelites are too selfish even to give that to people, had they any share in God's wealth. We praise God that they do not have any share, otherwise all mankind would have perished.

Or is it envy? They envied the Prophet and the Muslims the great bounty God

gave them when He revealed to them the religion that brought about their rebirth. Thus He gave them their distinctive character, as well as confidence, reassurance, light, purity, and strength. It is certainly their envy, along with their realisation that they had missed out on achieving their ambitions to impose their moral and economic authority on the Arabs, a nation that was divided before it had any religion worthy of the name.

But why should the Jews envy anyone on whom God bestows favours when they themselves had enjoyed much of such favour ever since the time of Abraham. God granted Abraham's household Scriptures and prophethood as well as a kingdom. It was the Israelites who did not appreciate God's favours, nor did they fulfil their obligations. Some of them were truly unbelievers. Nevertheless, people who have enjoyed all this grace should never begrudge anyone anything God may grant them. *"We have indeed given revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion. Some of them believe in him and some turn away from him."* (Verses 54-55)

It is perhaps the worst type of envy that one who enjoys much of God's favours should envy others what they have been granted by Him. When a person who is totally deprived of favours envies others, his envy is a terrible vice. For one who enjoys much, envy is a mark of genuine evil. Hence, the warning against an evil doom: *"Sufficient scourge is the fire of Hell."* (Verse 55)

Two Contrasting Destinies

At this point, the *sūrah,* which speaks of adherence to faith or lack of it among Abraham's descendants, states the general rule of reward which applies to believers and unbelievers alike, in all religions and at all times. Here it is stated in the form of a scene from the Day of Judgement: *"Those who disbelieve in Our revelations We shall, in time, cause them to endure fire: every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]. God is indeed Almighty, Wise. But those who believe and do righteous deeds We shall admit into gardens through which running waters flow, where they shall abide beyond the count of time. There they shall have pure spouses, and We shall admit them into a cool, dense shade."* (Verses 56-57)

"Every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]." It is a never- ending scene, placed before our own eyes, and repeated time after time. Our minds concentrate on it and we would not stare away. It is a fearful scene and what is fearful may attract and hold people's eyes. When the scene is portrayed, its continuous repetition is expressed in two words: *"Every time"*. It is depicted as extremely fearful in half a sentence: *"Every time their skins are burnt out..."* It is amazing, supernatural. This effect is brought out in the

second half of the same sentence: *"We shall replace them with new skins"*. Then the effects of fear are emphasised and perpetuated in the second part of the subjective sentence. It is a fitting recompense for disbelief, when all the reasons for believing in God have been provided. *"So that they may taste suffering din full]."*God is certainly able to punish them in this way, wise to choose it for them: *"God is indeed Almighty, Wise."*

In opposition to this ever-burning fire, with ever-burning skins, we have a full picture of the perfect reward granted to those who believe in God and translate this belief into action. These are placed in *"gardens through which running waters flow"*. It is a reward given them forever, to emphasise the elements of settlement and continuity: *"Where they shall abide beyond the count of time."* In addition, they have what re-emphasises all these elements and what imparts a feeling of total happiness in eternal bliss: *"There they shall have pure spouses." We* also find a cool shade to add an air of ease and freshness to the scene of perfect bliss: *"We shall admit them into a cool, dense shade."* (Verse 57)

Thus we have the perfect contrast of reward and punishment, provided by contrasting scenes and images. This is typical of the Qur'ānic method in its portrayal of highly effective and powerful scenes from the Day of Judgement.

6
Sincerity and True Faith

God commands you to deliver whatever you have been entrusted with to their rightful owners, and whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice. Most excellent is what God exhorts you to do. God hears all and sees all. (58)

۞ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأۡمُرُكُمۡ أَن تُؤَدُّواْ ٱلۡأَمَٰنَٰتِ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمۡتُم بَيۡنَ ٱلنَّاسِ أَن تَحۡكُمُواْ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُم بِهِۦٓۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعَۢا بَصِيرٗا ٥٨

Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority. If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. This is the best [for you], and most suitable for final determination. (59)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِنكُمۡۖ فَإِن تَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ فِي شَيۡءٖ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمۡ تُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَحۡسَنُ تَأۡوِيلًا ٥٩

Are you not aware of those who claim that they believe in what has been bestowed from on high upon you, as well as in what was bestowed from on high before you? They seek the judgement of false gods, although they are bidden to deny them. But Satan wants to lead them far astray. (60)

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَزۡعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمۡ ءَامَنُواْ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ مِن قَبۡلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَحَاكَمُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَقَدۡ أُمِرُوٓاْ أَن يَكۡفُرُواْ بِهِۦۖ وَيُرِيدُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ أَن يُضِلَّهُمۡ ضَلَٰلَۢا بَعِيدٗا ٦٠

When it is said to them, "Come to that which God has bestowed from on high, and to the Messenger," you see the hypocrites turn away from you with aversion. (61)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمۡ تَعَالَوۡاْ إِلَىٰ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَإِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ رَأَيۡتَ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنكَ صُدُودٗا ٦١

But how will it be when calamity befalls them [on the Day of Judgement] because of what their hands have done in this world? They would then come to you, swearing by God, "Our aim was but to do good, and to bring about harmony." (62)

فَكَيْفَ إِذَآ أَصَـٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةُۢ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ
أَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ جَآءُوكَ يَحْلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَآ
إِلَّآ إِحْسَـٰنًا وَتَوْفِيقًا ٦٢

As for them — God knows all that is in their hearts. So leave them alone, and admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls. (63)

أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُ ٱللَّهُ مَا فِى قُلُوبِهِمْ
فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَعِظْهُمْ وَقُل لَّهُمْ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِمْ قَوْلًۢا بَلِيغًا ٦٣

We have sent every messenger so that he should be obeyed by God's leave. If, when they have wronged themselves, they would but come to you and pray to God to forgive them, and the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would surely find that God is the One who accepts repentance, Merciful. (64)

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ
بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذ ظَّلَمُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ
جَآءُوكَ فَٱسْتَغْفَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ
ٱلرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا ٦٤

But no, by your Lord! They do not really believe unless they make you judge in all disputes between them, and then find in their hearts no bar to an acceptance of your decisions and give themselves up in total submission. (65)

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ
فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا۟ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا۟
تَسْلِيمًا ٦٥

Yet if We were to order them, "Lay down your lives," or, "Forsake your homelands," only a very few of them would do it; but if they would do what they are admonished to do, it would indeed be for their own good and apt to strengthen them greatly [in faith]. (66)

وَلَوْ أَنَّا كَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَنِ ٱقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ أَوِ
ٱخْرُجُوا۟ مِن دِيَـٰرِكُم مَّا فَعَلُوهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ
مِّنْهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ فَعَلُوا۟ مَا يُوعَظُونَ بِهِۦ
لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ تَثْبِيتًا ٦٦

And We should indeed grant them, out of Our grace, a mighty reward, (67)

وَإِذًا لَّـَٔاتَيْنَـٰهُم مِّن لَّدُنَّآ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ٦٧

and indeed guide them along a straight path. (68)

وَلَهَدَيْنَٰهُمْ صِرَٰطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٦٨﴾

All who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these! (69)

وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَعَ
ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ
وَٱلصِّدِّيقِينَ وَٱلشُّهَدَآءِ وَٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ۚ
وَحَسُنَ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴿٦٩﴾

Such is God's bounty, and sufficient it is that God knows all. (70)

ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَضْلُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ
عَلِيمًا ﴿٧٠﴾

Overview

This passage tackles a very serious issue in the life of the Muslim community. It speaks about the conditions that must obtain for faith to exist and the boundaries that must be observed, i.e. the system laid down for the Muslim community to implement.

It is important to realise that the Qur'ān actually brings the Muslim community into existence and nurtures it to ensure its proper growth: *"You are the best community that has ever been raised for mankind." (3:*110) Indeed, what the Qur'ān achieved with the first Muslim community was man's re-birth. This was no mere step along the way, a stage in development, or even a leap forward. It was rather a definitive re-birth of the Arabs, and of mankind generally.

To appreciate this we need first to look at pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and other aspects of the Arabs' literary heritage, which delineate their outlook on life, existence, the universe, man, morality and behaviour, as well as the main features of their social life, their feelings, concepts and culture. In short, all that reflects the Arab personality. We should then look at all this in the light of the Qur'ān, as also consider the realities of Arab society both before and after Islam. This will confirm, in the most vivid and clear way, that the Qur'ān initiated a new community. It is God who, to use the Qur'ānic term, "raised" this community. That, in itself, was a unique case. To our knowledge, it was the only time in history that a complete community, with clearly distinctive characteristics, came into existence through the pages of a book. But no wonder, for it is God's Book, containing His own words.

Anyone who disputes this should tell us where this community was before God initiated it with His revealed Book. We certainly know that it was living in the Arabian peninsula, but what position did it occupy in the ranking of human civilisation? Where could it be placed at humanity's dining table? What contribution did it make in human history?

This community was nurtured by the religion of Islam and moulded by its perfect way of life. Thereafter, it mapped its way, assuming the leadership of mankind, on the basis of the Divine Book. Its whole life has borne its mark. It has never had any other quality to give it such a position of leadership among mankind. History bears witness to all this. What is more is that God fulfilled His promise to the Arabs as He says to them: *"We have bestowed on you from on high a Book that contains all that you ought to bear in mind. Will you not use your reason?"* (21: 10)

It is by reason of the Qur'ān that the Arabs acquired a position on the world stage and had a role to play in human history. It is the Qur'ān which has given them their status and civilisation. Yet some people, devoid of intelligence, make it their mission in life to reject God's favours showered on the Arabs. They dismiss as irrelevant God's favour, which brought His final message to mankind through the Arabs, and in their language. Through this, He gave them an honourable position, a history and a true civilisation. Nevertheless, these people want to take off the garment God has given them to wear and to tear down the banner under which they achieved all their glory.

As the Qur'ān started to nurture the Muslim community, making prominent its Islamic features and erasing the marks of ignorance in its lifestyle and character, re-organising its whole society, leading its battle against the forces of ignorance that worked hard to preserve its old ways and practices, it began by giving the Muslim community a totally new concept and outlook. It laid down the basic conditions of faith and its limiting boundaries. It linked all this to its distinctive system which gives it the characteristics that made it "the best community that has ever been raised for mankind," assigning to it its role of leading mankind to the Divine path and way of life.

This passage defines the source from which the Muslim community derives its way of life, how it receives it, the method of understanding what it learns, the ultimate arbiter in controversial matters where a clear verdict is needed, and the authority to obey and how it derives its mandate. Such definitions clearly set out the conditions of faith and the boundaries of Islam.

This is the central issue which this passage makes absolutely clear. When we study it, we wonder how anyone who claims to be a Muslim could argue about it. Here, the Muslim community reads that God's messengers were sent to mankind so that they

may be obeyed, by God's leave, not merely to convey God's message or to advocate the Divine way of lift "We *have sent every messenger so that he should be obeyed by God's leave."* (Verse 64) The Muslim community is also told that people will not be true believers unless they refer all their disputes to God's method and constitution. During the Prophet's time, this meant accepting the Prophet's rulings in all situations. After him, this means that reference must be made to the Qur'ān and to the Prophet's *sunnah.* What is more, it is not enough that they should refer to him in order to be accepted as believers; they must accept his rulings without hesitation. (Verse 65)

The *sūrah* also tells the members of the Muslim community that those who want to refer their disputes to false gods, i.e. to a law other than God's law, will not have their claims to be believers accepted. Their claim is false, belied by their reference to false gods. (Verse 60) The Muslim community is told that their refusal to refer all disputes to God's revelations and His Messenger is a clear mark of hypocrisy. (Verse 61)

The *sūrah* also makes it clear to the Muslim community that its faith defines for it a Divine way of life and a constitution which, together, stipulate that it must obey God by implementing the Qur'ān, obey His Messenger by following his *sunnah,* and obey those believers who have been given power. It is also made aware that the ultimate arbiter in matters of controversy and in any question on which we have no definitive ruling is God and His Messenger, i.e. God's law and the Prophet's practice. Thus the Divine method continues to have the final say in whatever question, problem or dispute may arise at any time, now and in the future. This is the basic rule of the Muslim community without which it cannot be a community of true believers in Islam.

We must not forget what we have explained in our commentary on verse 48, which says: *"God will never forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills.''* We mentioned there that the Jews were described as idolaters because they took their rabbis for gods. They did not worship them as such. The fact that they accepted and obeyed what those rabbis legislated, under their own claimed authority and with no basis of Divine law, classed the Jews as associating partners with God. Thus, they were guilty of that offence which God does not forgive. He forgives every other sin, including cardinal ones, such as adultery, theft and drinking intoxicants. Thus, the whole issue rests on believing in God's absolute oneness, and that, as such, all sovereignty belongs to Him alone. Sovereignty is, after all, the central quality of Godhead. Within these limits, a person remains a Muslim and a believer. He may hope to have all his sins, including cardinal ones, forgiven. Once these limits are breached, the person who breaches them, in effect, associates partners with God, and this is something God does not forgive. Such is the basic

condition of faith.

This is the great issue which is discussed fully in this passage and to which we now turn in detail.

Trust and Justice

> *God commands you to deliver whatever you have been entrusted with to their rightful owners, and whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice. Most excellent is what God exhorts you to do. God hears all and sees all.* (Verse 58)

These are the main obligations placed on the Muslim community and these sum up its moral code: namely, fulfilment of trust and maintaining justice. The basic and most important trust is that which God has implanted in human nature. This is the one which the heavens, the earth and the mountains refused to accept, but which man undertook. It is that of willingly and deliberately recognising Divine guidance and believing in God. This is the trust that God has given to human beings alone in their very nature. Other creatures have been given faith without the need for any effort on their part. Thus, they recognise their Lord and worship Him without having to make any choice or exerting any special effort. It is man alone who has been given this task to fulfil on the basis of his guiding nature, knowledge, reasoning, will and effort. He will always receive God's help in that: *"As for those who strive hard in Our cause, We shall most certainly guide them to paths that lead to Us; for, indeed, God is with those who do good."* (29: 69)

This is, then, the first trust man has to fulfil. It is that which gives rise to all other trusts which God commands people to fulfil. An important one among these being to give testimony in favour of Islam. This takes the form firstly of striving hard within oneself so that one's life, feelings, actions and behaviour become a practical translation of faith. Thus, when people praise a believer's behaviour, values and manners and moral standards, they realise that it is only because he believes in Islam that he is able to attain such high standards.

Another way of giving testimony in favour of Islam is the realisation of just how much more profound and superior Islam is to other human beliefs. With this knowledge, a believer begins to call on people to believe in Islam, explaining its values and principles. It is not sufficient then for a believer to keep his faith to himself. He must fulfil his task of making it known, calling upon others to accept it. That is part of his trust and as such he should discharge it.

Testimony is further given by taking steps to help implement Islam as a code of living for the Muslim community, and in human life in general. To do this, believers should make use of every means available to them both as individuals and as

members of that community. Such a practical implementation is the most important trust, second only to accepting the faith itself. No individual and no group are exempt from this trust. The Prophet says: *"Jihād"* continues until the Day of Resurrection." Jihād in this sense is a fulfilment of a specific trust.

Another trust which is implied in the above is that of dealing with people and delivering to them whatever they have entrusted to us. That includes honesty in daily transactions, giving honest counsel to rulers and ruled, taking good care of young children, protecting the interests of the community and defending it against hostile forces and observing all duties and obligations outlined by the Divine code. All these are trusts that must be fulfilled.

The order to maintain justice is stated in the most general terms so as to make it obligatory between all people. It does not mean that justice should be confined to Muslims only, or to dealings between them and the followers of earlier Divine religions alone. Justice is due to every individual human being. The requirement to maintain justice only takes into account the fact that people are human beings, and that that alone qualifies them for just treatment. Hence, justice should be extended to all: believers and non-believers, friends and enemies, white and coloured, Arabs and non-Arabs, etc. The Muslim community, whenever it exercises power, is responsible for maintaining justice between them all. In fact, humanity has never experienced such justice except under Islamic rule, when Muslims were the leaders of mankind. Once Muslims lost that leadership, humanity has been unable to experience any similar justice that applies to all people, simply because they are human beings. Such administration of pure and complete justice is the cornerstone of Islamic government, and delivering trusts to their rightful owners is the basic characteristic of life under Islam.

The verse makes it clear that orders both to be true to one's trust and to maintain justice between people are part of God's admonition. Good and greatly beneficial indeed is whatever God directs and admonishes us to do. Besides, this is not a mere admonition; it is an order. God only describes it as admonition because that makes it easier to fulfil. Hearts and consciences accept admonition more readily, because its implementation appears to be more of a voluntary nature.

The final comment in the verse attaches the whole matter to fear of God and hope for His reward: *"God hears all and sees all." There* is perfect harmony between the duties God imposes on Muslims and the requirements to fulfil trust and maintain justice on the one hand and God's seeing and hearing everything on the other. God is certain to hear and see all matters related to the fulfilment of trust. Justice, on the other hand, requires good attention, sharp vision and proper evaluation and judgement, as well as taking into account all the relevant factors and circumstances so as to evaluate them properly. Moreover, the order to do both comes from the One

who hears and sees all things.

Then we ask: What is the standard by which to define, measure and administer the fulfilment of trust and the maintaining of justice, in all spheres and aspects of life? Is this something to be left to people's traditions and personal judgement? Reason has its position and value as a means of acquiring knowledge and recognising guidance; that is true. However, when we speak of reason as a human quality, we refer to the reason of individuals and groups in a particular set-up, influenced as it may be by a host of factors. There is nothing we may call "human reason" as an absolute concept. Every individual or group has a reason and a mind of his or its own, at a particular place and time. But all these are subject to various influences, pulling them in all manner of directions.

An Accurate Standard for the Human Mind

It is imperative that a proper standard should be available for all these minds to refer to in order to establish right and wrong in their evaluation and judgement of different issues. The human mind is the one tool available to man in order to determine the accuracy and fairness of his judgements, for this standard does not bend in order to please or appease anyone. The standards people produce for themselves cannot be placed on the same level, because these may be faulty or defective, leading to an imbalance that affects all values. The only way to avoid such imbalance is to refer to the ever-accurate standard God has established for human life in order to maintain honesty and justice, and to establish all proper values and rulings in all spheres of human activity: *"Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority. If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. This is the best [for you], and most suitable for final determination."* (Verse 59)

In this short statement, God explains the conditions for being a believer and the boundaries of Islam. At the same time, He outlines the underlying rule of the constitution of the Muslim community, the basis of all judgement and the source of all authority. All these begin and end with receiving guidance from God alone, and, where there is no clear statement, to refer to Him in any detail that may arise in human life over which people may differ.

Sovereignty belongs to God alone in all human life and all its affairs, large and small. God has enacted a constitution and a law which He has embodied in His revealed Book, the Qur'ān, and sent His Messenger to explain it to people. God's Messenger *"does not speak out of his own desire: that [which he conveys to you] is but a [Divine] inspiration which he receives."* (53: 3-4) Hence, the Prophet's *sunnah* is part of God's law.

To obey God is obligatory. One of the essential elements of Godhead is that God enacts the law; implementation of this is, thus, obligatory. Believers are required to obey God, to start with, and to obey His Messenger, since it is God that has sent him with His message. Thus, obedience to the Prophet is part of obeying God Himself. Moreover, the Prophet's *sunnah* and his judgement are part of the Divine law that must be implemented. Whether a person is a believer or not is conditional on such obedience and implementation. As the Qur'ān specifies: *"If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day."* (Verse 59)

The verse that gives the order to obey God and His Messenger also orders that those *"entrusted with authority"* must also be obeyed. However, these are clearly defined as the ones "*from among you,"* i.e. from among the believers who meet the condition of faith and keep within the boundaries of Islam. This requires them to obey God and His Messenger, accept sovereignty as belonging to God alone and implement only His guidance. The text, as it is phrased, makes obedience to both God and the Messenger a basic, unquestionable duty. Obedience to people entrusted with authority comes as a corollary of such obedience to God and His Messenger. Obeying them applies to that which is known of God's law, that which is not covered by a statement of prohibition and that which is not subject to prohibition when referred to God's law. The *sunnah* makes the extent of such obedience to those people who are "entrusted with authority" very clear: The Prophet says: "Obedience applies in what is reasonably equitable." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim also relate: "A Muslim is required to listen and obey, when he likes or dislikes, unless he is ordered to commit what is forbidden. Should he be so ordered, then he must neither listen nor obey." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) In an authentic *ĥadīth* related by Muslim, the Prophet is quoted as saying: "When you are ruled by a slave who implements God's Book, listen to him and obey."

Thus Islam makes every individual in a position of trust with regard to God's law and the Prophet's *sunnah.* That trust covers his own faith, body, soul and destiny in this life and in the life to come. No individual, man or woman, is a sheep in the flock, one in the crowd, obeying orders from here or there. The law and constitution are abundantly clear, and the limits of obedience are also clear. The law and the *sunnah* to be obeyed are the same, thus giving rise to neither division nor confusion.

- Such obedience to people entrusted with authority applies when we have definitive statements in the Qur'ān or the *ĥadīth.* Where no such definitive statement exists, and when we have something new arising as a result of new circumstances, and over which people may have differences of understanding and viewpoints — such matters have not been left hanging in the air, without the possibility of deducing rulings and judgements. In a short statement, the whole basis and

operation of arriving at such rulings through scholarly discretion is laid down: *"If you are in dispute over anything, refer it-to God and the Messenger."* (Verse 59)

What this means is that in such matters where a ruling is needed, these should be referred to whatever implicitly applies to them of Qur'ānic and *ĥadīth* statements. If no such text is applicable, then they should be referred to the general principles of God's law and constitution. These are by no means fluid, confusing or ambiguous, as some people may suggest. Indeed, this religion of ours lays down clear, basic principles covering all aspects of human life, together providing a clear boundary which cannot be breached without any living Islamic conscience recognising the breach.

"If you truly believe in God and the Last Day." (Verse 59) Thus, obeying God and His Messenger, as well as those believers entrusted with authority and trying hard to ensure the implementation of God's law, and referring what is in dispute to God and the Messenger, are all a condition and result of believing in God and the Day of Judgement. Faith does not come into existence unless this condition is fulfilled and its result comes into effect.

Following the previous admonition to fulfil trust and maintain justice, the verse, having explained the issue in such a conditional way, now reiterates it in the form of an admonition that makes it genuinely desired: *"This is the best [for you], and most suitable for final determination."* (Verse 59) It is, indeed, best for you in this life and in the life to come, and it works to your own good in the final resolve in both lives. Great as it is that following this method ensures God's pleasure and earns His reward in the life to come, it is not the only result. Additionally, it ensures the best results for both the individual and the community in this present life.

By following this constitution man reaps the whole benefit of a code of living devised by the Almighty, the Wise whose knowledge is perfect and absolute; a code free of human ignorance, desire and weakness. It is a code of living that favours no individual, class, nation, race or generation over another, because God is the Lord of all mankind who does not entertain any prejudice or favouritism for anyone.

This code of living has numerous advantages, among which is the fact that its author is the Maker of man who knows his nature and its real needs, his inner feelings and preferences, and how he responds and reforms. God does not need to go through trials and errors in order to learn what suits mankind. Far be it from Him to have any such need. When we follow this code of living, we spare ourselves the heavy price of following alternative methods that are bound to be defective, invented as they are by people who lack solid evidence. It is sufficient for human beings to exert their inventive talents in the material world, for this offers them very wide scope. On the other hand, human intellect will have much to do in trying to

implement God's constitution, recognising the areas that allow for analogy and discretion.

Another advantage is that its author is the Creator of the universe in which man lives. Thus, He produces for man a system that remains in perfect harmony with the laws that operate in the universe. This gives man an awareness that he is not in conflict with these laws. He only needs to understand and benefit by them. The Divine constitution will guide his footsteps and provide him with protection as he does so.

A further advantage is that this Divine constitution treats man with respect and honour, allowing him scope for discretion on the basis of scholarship that understands the texts and refers what is new to such texts and the principles they lay down. Hence, following Divine guidance will always be *"the best [for you], and most suitable for final determination."* (Verse 59)

Claims Belied by Action

Now the *sūrah* refers to those who claim to be believers but who deliberately violate the central condition of faith, trying to refer their disputes to false gods for arbitration, when they have been commanded to reject such false gods. The *sūrah* wonders at their attitude and warns them against Satan's attempts to lead them far astray. It describes their reaction when they show their aversion to being called upon to adhere to what God has revealed and to follow His Messenger. The *sūrah* considers this an act of hypocrisy, and denounces their reference to false gods as a rejection of faith. When their wicked plans end up in misery they try to justify themselves, but their justification is shown to be hollow and false. Nevertheless, God directs His Messenger (peace be upon him) to give them good counsel and to admonish them. The paragraph concludes with a clear statement of God's purpose in sending Messengers, which shows that they must be obeyed.

> *Are you not aware of those who claim that they believe in what has been bestowed from on high upon you, as well as in what was bestowed from on high before you? They seek the judgement of false gods, although they are bidden to deny them. But Satan wants to lead them far astray. When it is said to them, "Come to that which God has bestowed from on high, and to the Messenger," you see the hypocrites turn away from you with aversion. But how will it be when calamity befalls them [on the Day of Judgement! because of what their hands have done in this world? They would then come to you, swearing by God, "Our aim was but to do good, and to bring about harmony." As for them — God knows all that is in their hearts. So leave them alone, and admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls. We have sent every messenger so that he should be obeyed by God's leave. If when they have wronged themselves, they would but come to you and pray to God to forgive them, and*

the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would surely find that God is the One who accepts repentance, Merciful. But no, by your Lord. They do not really believe unless they make you judge in all disputes between them, and then find in their hearts no bar to an acceptance of your decisions and give themselves up in total submission. (Verses 60-65)

This description suggests that all this was in the early stages, after Islam first settled in Madinah. At the time, the hypocrites mustered a substantial force and the Jews, who co-operated with the hypocrites, commanded real strength. Those who did not wish to refer their disputes to God's law, preferring to refer them to false gods instead, might have been a group of hypocrites, as they are clearly described in the second verse in this paragraph. Alternatively, they might have been Jews who, when they needed arbitration in their dealings with the people of Madinah, were invited to refer them to God's Book, i.e. the Torah, in some cases, or to God's Messenger in others. They declined and preferred to refer them to the local traditions that prevailed in pre-Islamic Arabia. After consideration, we feel that the first view is more accurate, especially in light of their claims *"that they believe in what has been bestowed from on high upon you, as well as in what was bestowed from on high before you."* (Verse 60) The Jews did not claim to have accepted Islam or to have believed in what was revealed to the Prophet. It was the hypocrites who made such claims in the early period of Islam, i.e. before their power was severely curtailed with the victories achieved against the Jews of Quraiżah and Khaybar. This subsequently led to the steady weakening of the hypocrites' power in Madinah.

Whatever the case, our understanding of these verses is that they make absolutely clear the conditions for faith just as they define the meaning of Islam. We see in them a clear declaration that any one who wishes to refer to false gods is a non-believer, because God has ordained that people should disbelieve in such false gods. We also read in them an oath, by God, that such people will not attain to faith and will not be included among the believers until they refer their disputes to the Prophet for arbitration, accept his judgement and put it into force. This must be an obedience inspired by contented acceptance of his rulings.

"Are you not aware of those who claim that they believe in what has been bestowed from on high upon you, as well as in what was bestowed from on high before you? They seek the judgement of false gods, although they are bidden to deny them. But Satan wants to lead them far astray." (Verse 60) Have you seen this most amazing situation? Here are a group of people who profess to believe, but immediately negate their own assertions. They claim to believe in what has been revealed to Muĥammad and in earlier revelations as well, but they will not refer their disputes for arbitration on the basis of such revelations. Instead, they want to refer them to a different system, seeking different rulings based on nothing that is contained in God's revelations. That means that they

refer them to "false gods", which claim for themselves an essential attribute of Godhead, and, hence, they apply no clear and accurate criteria.

Moreover, they do not do so out of ignorance or doubt. They know for certain that they are forbidden to refer to such false gods, as the verse makes clear: *"They seek the judgement of false gods, although they are bidden to deny them."* (Verse 60) Hence, their claims to believe in God's revelations cannot be true. The fact is that Satan tries to steer them far away from God's guidance, so that they cannot return to it at any time: *"But Satan wants to lead them far astray."* (Verse 60) This is, then, the cause behind their reference to false gods and the reason for their violation of the essentials of faith. It is all stated clearly for them so that they may take heed and mend their ways. It is also made clear to the Muslim community so that it realises who inspires and supports such people.

The *sūrah* continues to illustrate their reaction when they are called upon to refer co what they profess to believe of Divine revelations given to Muĥammad and earlier prophets: *"When it is said to them, 'Come to that which God has bestowed from on high, and to the Messenger,' you see the hypocrites turn away from you with aversion."* (Verse 61)

It is a certainty that hypocrisy will out. It will inevitably contradict obvious natural logic. Otherwise it would not be hypocrisy. An obvious and natural result of belief is that a person should refer for arbitration to what and whom he believes in. Hence, when a person professes to believe in God and what He has revealed, and in the Prophet and the revelations he has received, then he is called upon to refer any dispute to them. When he declines and turns away, he contradicts obvious natural logic and reveals his hypocrisy. He belies his own claims of believing in God, His revelations and Messenger.

The *sūrah* then portrays one specific aspect of hypocrisy in their behaviour. That is when they encounter misfortune or calamity as a result of their refusal to refer matters to God's revelations and to His Messenger, or their reference to false gods. They are certain to come up with excuses, but these are only the excuses of hypocrisy: *"But how will it be when calamity befalls them [on the Day of Judgement! because of what their hands have done in this world? They would then come to you, swearing by God, 'Our aim was but to do good, and to bring about harmony.'"* (Verse 62)

Such a calamity could have occurred at the time, as a result of their reality being exposed. This would have seen them outcast and boycotted by the Muslim community. That community would not have tolerated having in its midst people asserting to believe in God, the Messenger and revelation, yet who turn away from the same when they are invited to have their disputes adjudged by God's Messenger. Such an attitude would only be accepted in a society where faith does not exist: a society whose share of faith is nothing more than the claims asserted by such people

and whose share of Islam is no more than names and allegations.

Another calamity may also befall them, in the form of any injustice they suffer as a result of putting their disputes to a system other than that ordained by God to ensure full justice to all. Thus, their efforts to ensure fair treatment end up in miserable failure. Or they may suffer a calamity as a test to which they are put by God, so that they may once again reflect upon and accept His guidance. 'Whatever the cause of the calamity, the *sūrah* wonders at their attitude when it occurs. They realise that they have to make their excuses to the Prophet: *"They would then come to you, swearing by God, `Our aim was but to do good, and to bring about harmony.'"* (Verse 62)

This is a sorrowful state of affairs. They return, aware of the enormity of their action, unable to face the Prophet with the true nature of their motives, yet ready with their false oaths that their action, which may have been arbitration according to pre-Islamic traditions, only aimed at achieving harmony in society and serving its interests. These are the claims of all people who refuse to refer to Divine law and its way of life. They assert that they only want to avoid problems and difficulties and to achieve harmony between different groups and beliefs. Such are the arguments of the hypocrites and those who falsely assert to be believers.

Limitless in His glory, God exposes their reality, and tells His Messenger that He knows the reality of what they harbour in their hearts. He, nevertheless, directs him to be gentle with them and to admonish them so that they may stop their double dealings: *"As for them — God knows all that is in their hearts. So leave them alone, and admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls."* (Verse 63) There is no doubt that God knows their real beliefs, motives and intentions, and how false their excuses are. Yet the policy He tells His Messenger to follow is to overlook their real attitude and to continue to treat them gently, so trying to teach and admonish them.

Here the verse uses a remarkable expression: *"Speak to them a word to reach their very souls."* (Verse 63) A literal translation would render the sentence: "Tell them, in their very souls, something highly effective." This portrays a very powerful action, showing the words as being directed to their very hearts and souls.

Yet in spite of their unacceptable action and their turning away from God's revelations, they are invited to turn back in repentance and to seek a comfortable and stable life, enjoying the care of God and His Messenger. The door is always open for repentance. It is certainly not too late for turning back to God, seeking His forgiveness. When the Prophet himself requests God to forgive them, they are certain to be forgiven, by God's leave.

Prophets Must Be Obeyed

A basic fact needs to be asserted here. God has sent His Messengers in order that they should be obeyed, by His leave. They may not be disobeyed. Their role is not merely that of guides and preachers: *"We have sent every messenger so that he should be obeyed by God's leave. If when they have wronged themselves, they would but come to you and pray to God to forgive them, and the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would surely find that God is the One who accepts repentance, Merciful."* (Verse 64) This is a very important fact. God's Messenger is not merely a day preacher who speaks fine words to which no one need pay any heed, as claimed by those who try to distort the role of faith and prophets.

Religion is a code for practical life, with all its systems, situations, values, morality, and worship. This requires that God's message should enjoy proper enforcement authority, commanding obedience. In fact, God has sent His messengers so that they be obeyed, by His leave and within His law, so that the Divine way of life is properly implemented. Thus, obedience of God's messenger is part of obeying God. He certainly has not sent a messenger so that he has only a moral effect on people and gets them to offer worship rituals. That would be an erroneous understanding of religion, which does not fit with the purpose of God sending His messengers. His purpose in so sending them is to establish a proper code in practical life. A world where a messenger has only to speak to people, urging them to mend their ways, and who then leaves them to throw his admonition behind their backs, is far from respectable.

This explains the true image of Islam in history: a message to be conveyed, a regime, an authority, and a system of government to implement the Islamic law and constitution after the Prophet has passed away. This ensures continuous obedience of the Prophet, generation after generation, and fulfils God's purpose behind sending His messengers. There is no other set-up which may be given the name Islam, or which represents the Islamic faith. The essential characteristic of any true Islamic set-up, regardless of the actual form or system it adopts, is complete acceptance of the Divine way of life, referring all matters to God's law, obeying God's Messenger in all that he has conveyed to us of God's message, and acknowledging that Godhead belongs completely to God alone. This makes all sovereignty, with its essential corollary of legislative authority, belong to God. An important result of this is not to refer to false gods in any matter, serious or trivial. Reference must always be to God and His Messenger in any situation that may come up as a result of life development.

The *sūrah* then opens up a way back for those who "wrong themselves" by deviating from God's way. This is the same chance as offered to the hypocrites of Madinah at the time of the Prophet: *"If when they have wronged themselves, they would but come to you and pray to God to forgive them, and the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would surely find that God is the One who accepts repentance, Merciful."*

(Verse 64) When repentance is genuine, God will definitely accept it. He is always merciful to those who return to Him. It is He who describes Himself as such and promises those who turn to Him in repentance, seeking His forgiveness, that He will accept their repentance and turn to them in mercy. Those who were the first to he addressed by this statement had the chance of requesting the Prophet to pray for their forgiveness. This chance is no longer there, but God's door remains open at all times, and His promise will always come true. No one need have any hesitation, once his repentance is sincere.

We then have a categorical and decisive statement, with God declaring an oath by His majestic self, that no one can be a true believer until he accepts the Prophet's rulings over all his life affairs and submits to them willingly, without any hesitation: *"But no, by your Lord! They do not really believe unless they make you judge in all disputes between them, and then find in their hearts no bar to an acceptance of your decisions and give themselves up in total submission."* (Verse 65) Again, we have here a reiteration of the conditions of faith and the boundaries of Islam. With such a statement from God, no one can argue about it in any way. Yet, in an attempt that cannot command any degree of respect, some people allege that this applies to a particular period of time, and to a certain group of people. By doing so, they betray their total lack of understanding of Islam and their complete failure to grasp the meaning of the Qur'ānic text.

What this verse states is a fundamental Islamic principle, expressed in the form of a confirmed oath, without any qualification. This cannot be construed as meaning that the Prophet, in person, should judge in all disputes between believers at all times. His judgement, as referred to here, means a judgement based on his faith and implementation of the Divine law. Otherwise, God's law and the Prophet's *sunnah* would have no place in the life of the community after the Prophet had passed away. Such was the standpoint of the most hardened apostates at the time of Abū Bakr, who fought them hard. In fact, he fought them for something much less serious, namely their refusal to obey Islam with respect to its obligation of *zakāt* payment and the Prophet's ruling on how it is paid after his death.

If it is sufficient as a proof of accepting Islam that people should refer their disputes to God's law and His Messenger's rulings. However, such referral is not sufficient as proof of having faith, unless it is accompanied by complete satisfaction and total and reassured submission. Such is the meaning of being a Muslim and having faith [i.e. *īmān].* Let everyone consider how far it is true in his or her own situation before making any claims under this heading.

A Law Made Easy

Next, the *sūrah* confirms that the code of living people are called upon to implement is easy to apply and that the law to judge in their disputes is compassionate, returning verdicts full of mercy. It does not impose on them anything that is too hard or requiring great sacrifices. God knows how weak man is, and He turns to him with mercy. He knows that if people have very tough duties, only a few will fulfil such duties. He does not wish to overburden them, or that they should fall into sin. Hence, He has not imposed on them what is too hard or what causes many of them to fall short of obeying Him. Thus, when people respond to God's admonition and fulfil the easy tasks imposed on them, they receive great benefits both in the life of this world and in the life to come. God is certain to help them by facilitating their guidance, as He helps everyone who tries his best to follow His guidance: *"Yet if We were to order them, Lay down your lives,' or, 'Forsake your homelands,' only a very few of them would do it; but if they would do what they are admonished to do, it would indeed be for their own good and apt to strengthen them greatly [in faith]. And We should indeed grant them, out of Our grace, a mighty reward, and indeed guide them along a straight path."* (Verses 66-68)

This religion of Islam is easy for anyone with an uncorrupted nature to follow. It does not require any superior will-power, available only to a few. The Islamic message is not meant for such a minority; it is a faith for all mankind. People differ in their abilities to fulfil obligations. The religion of Islam ensures that they are all able to fulfil their obligations and refrain from what is forbidden.

Killing oneself and forsaking one's homeland are two types of hardship to undergo. Were they made binding tasks, they would only be fulfilled by the smallest minority. They have not been imposed, because it is not an objective of Islam to impose such stringent obligations that are too difficult for most people to fulfil, or that most people turn away from. The objective is that all people should be able to fulfil them, so that all those with uncorrupted natures should e able to join the ranks of the faithful. In this way, the Muslim community will include people of different abilities and talents, which helps Islam to progress and refine itself.

Ibn Jurayj relates on the authority Abū Isĥāq al-Subay`ī: "When the verse stating *'if We were to order them, "Lay down your lives"'* was revealed, one of us said, 'Had we been ordered, we would have done it; but we praise God for having spared us.' The Prophet was informed and he commented, 'Some of my followers have firmer faith than great mountains .

Ibn Abī Ĥātim relates on the authority of `Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr: "When the verse stating *'if We were to order them, "Lay down your lives"'* was revealed, the Prophet said, 'Had it been required, Ibn Umm `Abd would have been one of them." Another report on the authority of Shurayĥ ibn Ubayd says: "When the Prophet recited the verse stating *'if We were to order them, "Lay down your lives"'* he pointed to `Abdullāh

ibn Rawāĥah and said, `Had God ordered this, that man would have been among the few who responded.'"

God's Messenger's knowledge of his followers was both intimate and profound. He knew the qualities of each one of them more than they knew themselves. The history of his blessed life reveals numerous examples of the Prophet's intimate knowledge of each one of his Companions, as well as his knowledge of the people and tribes who were fighting him. His was the knowledge of the leader, aware of the minute details of all around him. This aspect of the Messenger's intimate knowledge has not as yet been studied fully. This, however, does not form part of our discussion here.

The Prophet, then, was aware that there were among his followers those who would have fulfilled the toughest of tasks, had these been required of them. However, he also knew that Divine religion is not meant for such elite among humanity. God knows the nature of the human being He has created and the limitations of his ability. Hence, He has not imposed on people, in the religion which He has revealed for all mankind, anything except what is easy for all people to accomplish, provided that they have honesty in their beliefs, a determined desire to obey God, and a nature uncorrupted by wicked influences.

To understand this is exceedingly important when we face evil calls advocating immoral behaviour under the pretext that it is part of human nature. Such philosophies claim that such are the limits of human nature, and they describe religion as an idealistic notion that cannot be implemented in real life. They allege that against every person who can fulfil religious obligations, there are one hundred who cannot.

This claim is both false and deceptive, and it betrays ignorance. It is a claim by people who neither understand man, nor have his Creator's knowledge about him. It is God, his Creator, who imposes on him religious duties, and He knows that these are within the ability of an ordinary human being, because religion is not made for the privileged few. It merely requires the sort of resolve an ordinary human being has, good intention and taking the first step to start along the Islamic way. This is sufficient to ensure the fulfilment of God's promise: *"But if they would do what they are admonished to do, it would indeed be for their own good and apt to strengthen them greatly [in faith]. And We should indeed grant them, out of Our grace, a mighty reward, and indeed guide them along a straight path."* (Verses 66-68)

Once a start is made, God's help is certain to come to ensure that steady progress is made. This is followed by great reward and guidance along the right path. God always tells the truth. He will never deceive His servants or leave His promises to them unfulfilled. *"Whose word could be truer than God's?"* (Verse 87)

When we speak of the easy nature of this religion of Islam, we are not referring to the concessions and exemptions it gives. Nor do we mean to gather all such concessions and make of them a guiding principle in life. This religion includes both hard duties and concessions. The first are essential, because they are what is required in the first place. The concessions are given to cater for emergencies and special situations. Presenting Islam as a collection of such concessions, some of its well-intentioned advocates say to other people: "Look how easy to follow this religion is!" On the other hand, some of those who are keen to appease the rulers or the masses try to find loopholes to satisfy their desires, making such loopholes the essence of Islam.

This religion of Islam is not a set of concessions or loopholes. It is a complete whole that includes matters requiring strong resolve as well as concessions. It is made easy for people, so that, once he has made his resolve, an ordinary person can follow it and attain his personal perfection, within the limitations of his human nature. This is analogous to a garden in which grapes, plums, pears, berries, figs and cucumber become ripe, but have different tastes. Once each of them becomes ripe, no one says it is not ripe simply because its taste is of a different kind from the rest. In the garden of Islam all sorts of fruits are grown and ripen, giving different tastes, but each attains its perfect stage. Thus, we say that Islam is God's plant, grown in God's field, under God's care.

The Reward of Obedience

At the end of this passage, *the sūrah* once again tries to arouse people's feelings, raising before them the prospect of the most noble companionship in the life to come: *"All who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these! Such is God's bounty, and sufficient it is that God knows all."* (Verses 69-70) It is a prospect to tempt every heart, even with the slightest degree of goodness and the faintest hope of attaining a good position in the life to come, with noble companions, enjoying God's endless favours. To be in the company of such a group can only come about by God's grace. No human being, devout as he or she may be, can ever hope to attain such a grade merely by their devotion. They attain it only through God's abounding grace.

It is fitting here that we should reflect on how the Prophet's Companions yearned for his company in the life to come as well. Some of them could not even contemplate parting with him, when he was still alive among them. When this verse was revealed, their hearts were filled with hope.

Al-Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Sa`īd ibn Jubayr that a man from the Anṣār

looked depressed when he came to the Prophet. The Prophet asked him the cause of his sorrow. He said: "It is something that I have been thinking of." When the Prophet asked him about it, the man said: "We come to see you in the morning and in the evening, look at you and sit with you. Tomorrow, you will be raised to be in the company of other prophets in Heaven,

b and we cannot attain to you." The Prophet gave him no reply. Then this verse was revealed, stating: *"All who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets..."* The Prophet sent someone to the man to give him this happy news.

A different version of this report is given by Abū Bakr ibn Mardawaih on `Ā'ishah's authority: "A man said to the Prophet, 'Messenger of God, you are dearer to me than myself, my family and my children. I may be at home when I mention you, and I cannot wait to come and see you. When I remember my death and your death, I realise that when you are admitted to heaven, your position will be high among the rest of the prophets. Should I be admitted to heaven, I fear that I may not see you." The Prophet did not answer him until this verse was revealed: "*All who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these!*" (Verse 69)

Rabī`ah ibn Ka`b al-Aslamī reports: "I used to stay some nights at the Prophet's home. One night I brought him water for his ablution and purification. He said to me, 'Tell me your request.' I said, 'Messenger of God, I seek to be your companion in heaven.' He said, 'Say something else.' I said, 'That is my request.' He said, `Then help me to triumph over yourself by frequent prayer and prostration." (Related by Muslim.)

Al-Bukhārī relates on the authority of several of the Prophet's Companions that God's Messenger was asked about a person who loves a certain company, but whose actions leave him unable to catch up with them. He said: "A person is grouped [in the hereafter] with those whom he loves." Anas reports, "Muslims were never happier than when they heard this *ĥadīth."*

Those Companions of the Prophet were genuinely concerned about the life to come and with whom they would be there, because they had experienced the Prophet's company in this life. This is, indeed, a matter of concern to everyone who truly loves God's Messenger. The last *ĥadīth* spreads its light over us, providing hope and reassurance.

7
Fighting for a Noble Purpose

Believers, be fully prepared against danger, and go to war either in small groups or all together. (71)

There are indeed among you such as would lag behind, and then, if a calamity befalls you, say, "God has bestowed His favours upon me in that I was not present with them!" (72)

But if good fortune comes to you from God, he is sure to say —just as if there had never been any question of love between you and him — "Oh, would that I had been with them; I would surely have had a [share in a] mighty triumph." (73)

Let them fight in God's cause — all who are willing to barter the life of this world for the life to come. To him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall grant a rich reward. (74)

And why should you not fight in the cause of God and the utterly helpless men, women and children who are crying, "Our Lord! Deliver us from this land whose people are oppressors, and send forth to us, out of Your grace, a protector, and send us one

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ خُذُواْ حِذۡرَكُمۡ فَٱنفِرُواْ ثُبَاتٍ أَوِ ٱنفِرُواْ جَمِيعٗا ٧١

وَإِنَّ مِنكُمۡ لَمَن لَّيُبَطِّئَنَّ فَإِنۡ أَصَٰبَتۡكُم مُّصِيبَةٞ قَالَ قَدۡ أَنۡعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيَّ إِذۡ لَمۡ أَكُن مَّعَهُمۡ شَهِيدٗا ٧٢

وَلَئِنۡ أَصَٰبَكُمۡ فَضۡلٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لَيَقُولَنَّ كَأَن لَّمۡ تَكُنۢ بَيۡنَكُمۡ وَبَيۡنَهُۥ مَوَدَّةٞ يَٰلَيۡتَنِي كُنتُ مَعَهُمۡ فَأَفُوزَ فَوۡزًا عَظِيمٗا ٧٣

۞ فَلۡيُقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَشۡرُونَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ وَمَن يُقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيُقۡتَلۡ أَوۡ يَغۡلِبۡ فَسَوۡفَ نُؤۡتِيهِ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ٧٤

وَمَا لَكُمۡ لَا تُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡمُسۡتَضۡعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ وَٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلۡوِلۡدَٰنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ أَخۡرِجۡنَا مِنۡ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِ ٱلظَّالِمِ أَهۡلُهَا وَٱجۡعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيّٗا وَٱجۡعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا ٧٥

that will help us." (75)

Those who believe fight in the cause of God, and those who reject the faith fight in the cause of evil. Fight, then, against the friends of Satan. Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan. (76)

Are you not aware of those who have been told, "Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]"? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God — or in even greater awe — and said, "Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!" Say, "Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. (77)

Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high." Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, "This is from God," whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you!" Say, "All is from God." What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? (78)

Whatever good happens to you is from God; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself. We have sent you as a Messenger to all mankind. Enough is God for a

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ يُقَـٰتِلُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ
وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ يُقَـٰتِلُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ
ٱلطَّـٰغُوتِ فَقَـٰتِلُوٓا۟ أَوْلِيَآءَ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنِ ۖ إِنَّ
كَيْدَ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنِ كَانَ ضَعِيفًا ﴿٧٦﴾

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ قِيلَ لَهُمْ كُفُّوٓا۟ أَيْدِيَكُمْ
وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ فَلَمَّا كُتِبَ
عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقِتَالُ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَخْشَوْنَ
ٱلنَّاسَ كَخَشْيَةِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْ أَشَدَّ خَشْيَةً ۚ
وَقَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا لِمَ كَتَبْتَ عَلَيْنَا ٱلْقِتَالَ لَوْلَآ
أَخَّرْتَنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ ۗ قُلْ مَتَـٰعُ ٱلدُّنْيَا
قَلِيلٌ وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّمَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰ وَلَا
تُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا ﴿٧٧﴾

أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا۟ يُدْرِككُّمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنتُمْ
فِى بُرُوجٍ مُّشَيَّدَةٍ ۗ وَإِن تُصِبْهُمْ حَسَنَةٌ
يَقُولُوا۟ هَـٰذِهِۦ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَإِن تُصِبْهُمْ
سَيِّئَةٌ يَقُولُوا۟ هَـٰذِهِۦ مِنْ عِندِكَ ۚ قُلْ كُلٌّ
مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَالِ هَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلْقَوْمِ لَا
يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا ﴿٧٨﴾

مَّآ أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَآ
أَصَابَكَ مِن سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِن نَّفْسِكَ ۚ
وَأَرْسَلْنَـٰكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ
شَهِيدًا ﴿٧٩﴾

witness. (79)

He who obeys the Messenger obeys God thereby. As for those who turn away—We have not sent you to be their keeper. (80)

And they say, "We do obey you," but when they leave you, some of them devise, in secret, something different from what you advocate. All the while God records what they thus devise in secret. Leave them, then, alone, and place your trust in God. Sufficient is God for a guardian. (81)

Will they not, then, try to understand the Qur'ān? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction! (82)

If any matter pertaining to peace or war comes to their knowledge, they make it known to all and sundry; whereas, if they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it. Were it not for God's bounty to you, and His grace, all but a few of you would certainly have followed Satan. (83)

Fight, then, in God's cause, since you are responsible only for your own self, and encourage the believers. God may well curb the might of the unbelievers; for God is the strongest in might, and in the ability to deter. (84)

Whoever rallies to a good cause shall have a share in its [benefit], and whoever rallies to an evil cause shall have a share in its

مَّن يُطِعِ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَقَدۡ أَطَاعَ ٱللَّهَۖ وَمَن
تَوَلَّىٰ فَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ حَفِيظٗا ٨٠

وَيَقُولُونَ طَاعَةٞ فَإِذَا بَرَزُواْ مِنۡ عِندِكَ
بَيَّتَ طَآئِفَةٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ غَيۡرَ ٱلَّذِي تَقُولُۖ وَٱللَّهُ
يَكۡتُبُ مَا يُبَيِّتُونَۖ فَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡ وَتَوَكَّلۡ
عَلَى ٱللَّهِۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ٨١

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَۚ وَلَوۡ كَانَ مِنۡ عِندِ
غَيۡرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُواْ فِيهِ ٱخۡتِلَٰفٗا كَثِيرٗا
٨٢

وَإِذَا جَآءَهُمۡ أَمۡرٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَمۡنِ أَوِ ٱلۡخَوۡفِ
أَذَاعُواْ بِهِۦۖ وَلَوۡ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ وَإِلَىٰٓ
أُوْلِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِنۡهُمۡ لَعَلِمَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَنۢبِطُونَهُۥ
مِنۡهُمۡۗ وَلَوۡلَا فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَرَحۡمَتُهُۥ
لَٱتَّبَعۡتُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ٨٣

فَقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ إِلَّا نَفۡسَكَۚ
وَحَرِّضِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۖ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَكُفَّ
بَأۡسَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْۚ وَٱللَّهُ أَشَدُّ بَأۡسٗا وَأَشَدُّ
تَنكِيلٗا ٨٤

مَّن يَشۡفَعۡ شَفَٰعَةً حَسَنَةٗ يَكُن لَّهُۥ نَصِيبٞ
مِّنۡهَاۖ وَمَن يَشۡفَعۡ شَفَٰعَةٗ سَيِّئَةٗ يَكُن لَّهُۥ
كِفۡلٞ مِّنۡهَاۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ مُّقِيتٗا

[burden]. God watches over everything. (85)

When a greeting is offered you, answer it with an even better greeting, or [at least] with its like. God keeps count of all things. (86)

٨٥

وَإِذَا حُيِّيتُم بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا۟ بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَآ أَوْ
رُدُّوهَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ حَسِيبًا

٨٦

Overview

Most probably, the verses in this passage were revealed early in the Madinah period, possibly after the Battle of Uĥud (626 AD) and before the Battle of the Moat (627 AD). The picture of the Muslim community that emerges from these verses gives that impression. It suggests the existence of a multiplicity of groups within the Muslim community; groups that were yet to mature, or unwilling to embrace the faith of Islam, and who resorted to duplicity and hypocrisy. It implies that the Muslim community was still in need of an extensive effort of education and induction into Islam. A community that required additional motivation and encouragement in order to take on the enormous task placed on its shoulders and meet its requirements, with respect to the concepts of the faith on the one hand and the confrontation with hostile forces on the other.

This in no way detracts from the fact that there were in that community many individuals whose faith, knowledge and understanding had scaled unparalleled heights of excellence and distinction. We are referring here to the Muslim community as a whole. In its condition at the time, it was a melting pot of different, non-homogeneous elements and, as these verses appear to indicate, in need of greater integration and harmonisation.

A closer look at the main features of these instructions takes us into the often-forgotten environment of the Muslim community in its human mode. Once we see this, we can perceive that community's strengths and weaknesses. We can see how the Qur'ān conducts the battle against human weakness and fights the effects of religious ignorance and other hostile forces on society, all at the same time. We can observe the Qur'ānic process of education as it transforms receptive individuals in the real world. Furthermore, we witness part of the continuous effort it dedicated to this purpose until it was able to pick up that group of human beings, with varying calibre and qualities, from the depths of ignorance to such heights of excellence, integration and homogeneity, all within the limits of human nature. All this was witnessed during the latter part of the Prophet Muĥammad's life.

This treatment is extremely valuable, for it helps us to understand the workings of human nature, its propensity to weakness and its predisposition for strength, as seen in the model Muslim community which was educated and raised by the Prophet himself according to the teachings and guidelines of the Qur'ān. It also helps us understand the Qur'ānic approach to education and teaching. We can see how the Qur'ān, gently and caringly, guides people in the real world, and how it arranges and brings into line the ranks of a society made up, as it was, of various qualities and aptitudes.

We can also benefit from this treatment by comparing our condition, and the conditions of other human societies, to the human realities of that select group of people. Our awareness of their weaknesses gives us hope against despairing or abandoning our own endeavours to reform and develop. This social model, with all its merits and virtues, should not live as a mere fleeting vision in our thoughts or as an example that is impossible for us to emulate in our efforts to rise from the depths of ignorance and regression to the heights of enlightenment and progress. Instead, it represents, for us today, a valuable repertoire and benefit. One which we gain from living under the shade of the Qur'ān.

From this passage, we may conclude that the first Muslim community encompassed several groups. There were those who sought excuses for not going out to fight, and who urged others to do likewise. These gloated when the Muslims suffered setbacks but whinged and complained when they triumphed and were themselves excluded from the booty. In other words, these were they who traded the rewards of the life to come for gains in this life.

Then, there were some from among those who had immigrated from Makkah, i.e. the Muhājirīn, who were eager to fight when they were not obliged to do so in Makkah, but who once in Madinah and required to fight, became apprehensive and stricken with apathy. They wished that God would grant them a period of grace and delay any need for them to fight.

Others would acknowledge God's favour when things went well, but blame the Prophet for any misfortune. Their attitude was not taken on the basis of strong faith in God but was rather an attempt to undermine and vilify the Prophet's leadership. There were also those who showed deference to the Prophet whilst in his presence but who, once they had departed, conspired with others against him. Rumour mongers were also found seeking to sow confusion and discord. Then, there were the sceptics who doubted that Qur'ānic commands and directives originated from God, and who thought instead that some of them were Muĥammad's own ideas and thoughts.

Lastly, there were those who defended some of the hypocrites, as we shall see in

due course, and whose actions split the community into two camps. Their behaviour indicated deficient harmony and consistency in faith as also in their understanding of the role of leadership and their relationship with it.

All these types can be brought together into a single group of hypocrites, or we can classify them into two groups: the hypocrites and those of weak faith. The latter group consists of those who had not fully developed their new Islamic character, even though some of them belonged to those who had immigrated from Makkah. However, the existence of these groups within the Muslim community, as it faced hostility from the Jews inside Madinah, the Arab idolaters of Makkah and other enemies lurking all over Arabia, was bound to create cracks in its structure, requiring a prolonged process of education and intensive application.

In the present passage, we learn of aspects of that process and application. We read of the careful, profound and patient treatment of all the ills that may affect individuals as well as the community as a whole. This is manifested in the perseverance of the supreme leader and benefactor of that community, the Prophet Muĥammad, who was teaching and moulding that community according to the guidance of the Qur'ān.

We find precautionary instructions urging the Muslims to go out to fight in groups and squadrons, rather than as single individuals, in view of the risks and the hostile environment surrounding them. They were susceptible to ambush by the hypocrites living in their midst, and their allies among the Jews and other enemy collaborators.

Those who were dithering are portrayed in a dismal light, exposing their broken spirits, their craving for short-term gains, and their shifting loyalties. We find astonishment at those who in Makkah were outspoken in their advocacy of confrontation but who were overcome with anxiety and apprehension the moment they were instructed to take up arms against their enemies after they had settled in Madinah.

We find God's pledge of a generous reward to those who fight for His cause: *"To him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall grant a rich reward."* (Verse 74)

The passage also portrays the integrity, magnificence and nobility of the aims and objectives of the cause the Muslims are urged to fight for: *"Fight [for] the cause of God and the utterly helpless men, women and children who are crying, 'Our Lord! Deliver us from this land whose people are oppressors, and send forth to us, out of Your grace, a protector, and send us one that will help us.'"* (Verse 75)

The *sūrah* also emphasises the morality and sound objective for which the believers are fighting, as well as the fallacy and weakness of the unbelievers' cause:

"Those who believe fight in the cause of God, and those who reject the faith fight in the cause of evil. Fight, then, against the friends of Satan. Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan." (Verse 76)

We see how the Qur'ān deals with and corrects false beliefs that lead to corrupt thoughts and unhealthy behaviour. At times, it asserts the truth about this life and the life to come: *"Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God- fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth."* (Verse 77) At others, it stresses the inevitability of death and the way it is brought about, no matter how much one may guard against it or evade having to fight for God's cause: *"Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high."* (Verse 78) It also asserts the reality of God's will and of man's actions: *"Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, 'This is from God,' whereas when evil befalls them, they say, 'This is from you!' Say, All is from God.' What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? Whatever good happens to you is from God; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself."* (Verses 78-9)

We witness how the Qur'ān stresses the true nature of the relationship between God Almighty and His Messenger as we are told that obeying God's Messenger is part of obeying God Himself. It confirms that the whole of the Qur'ān originates with God and that it calls on people to reflect on its unity and integrity, both demonstrating its single origin:

> *He who obeys the Messenger obeys God thereby.* (Verse 80)
>
> *Will they not, then, try to understand the Qur'ān? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!* (Verse 82)

Having exposed the rumour-mongers, the Qur'ān goes on to advise the Muslims of the safest and proper way for them to act within the collective conventions of the community. It says: *"...If they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it."* (Verse 83) It warns these elements against pursuing that route, as it reminds them of God's favour and grace in guiding them to Islam, saying: *"Were it not for God's bounty to you, and His grace, all but few of you would certainly have followed Satan."* (Verse 83)

One appreciates fully the disruption such phenomena could create within a Muslim community in need of such persistent and varied effort. We hear God Almighty instructing His Messenger to prosecute the *jihād,* even if he were the only one left in the field, and to press upon the believers to do likewise. The Messenger

shall be accountable only for his own actions, while God Almighty will take personal command of the battle: *"Fight, then, in God's cause, since you are responsible only for your own self and encourage the believers. God may well curb the might of the unbelievers; for God is the strongest in might, and in the ability to deter."* (Verse 84) This approach is clearly inspiring and motivating, raising people's hopes of victory and their confidence in God's power and authority.

Just as the Qur'ān was revealed from on high, so it led the Muslims in battle, regardless of which front they had to fight on. Perhaps the most important battle was that against their own selves; against their doubts, fears, misconceptions and the legacy of their pre-Islamic ignorance, as well as their intrinsic human weakness, none of which could be the result of hypocrisy or deviation. It, the Qur'ān, was gently steering them towards a position of power and full internal harmonisation, itself, a much farther and longer lasting goal. No matter how many really powerful members a community has, it is never safe if it has pockets of weakness within its ranks. With diversity of calibre, a community requires harmony and consistency, as it faces up to the mighty challenges awaiting it.

Let us now consider the text in detail.

Taking Proper Precautions

> *Believers, be fully prepared against danger, and go to war either in small groups or all together. There are indeed among you such as would lag behind, and then, if a calamity befalls you, say, "God has bestowed His favours upon me in that I was not present with them!" But if good fortune comes to you from God, he is sure to say — just as if there had never been any question of love between you and him — "Oh, would that I had been with them; I would surely have had a [share in a] mighty triumph."* (Verses 71-73)

This piece of advice is given to the believers by the "high command", God Almighty, who sets out the plan and points the way for believers to go. One is always amazed at how often the Qur'ān actually outlines for the Muslims, albeit in a general form, the blueprint, or order of battle, for the task they are about to undertake. Elsewhere, we find the Qur'ān offering the Muslims a general plan, saying: *"Believers, fight those unbelievers who are near to you and let them find you adamant."* (9: 123) Here it gives advice on the "tactics" to be employed: *"...Be fully prepared against danger, and go to war either in small groups or all together... "* In *Sūrah* 10, The Spoils of War, there are many instances of this kind (verses 57 ff.).

Thus, the Qur'ān not only teaches the Muslims the rules of worship and religious rites, or moral and ethical principles, as the pathetic view of religion suggests, but it

also deals with their life as a whole, covering all the developments and ramifications of life in the real world. On this basis, Islam rightfully demands full hegemony over human life. It accepts from Muslims, individuals as well as societies, nothing less than total submission and compliance with its way of life and teachings. It specifically rejects the idea that Muslims should, individually or collectively, seek several sources for organising their life: one for their personal life — religious, ethical and moral aspects as well as rituals of worship — based on God's revelations, and another for economic, social, political and international matters taken from different sources or based purely on human thought. The duty of such thought is nothing more than to derive and deduce from the Qur'ān detailed rules and principles applicable to life's practical and ever-changing situations and developments, as outlined in the last passage of this *sūrah.* Otherwise, all claims of true belief in Islam are meaningless. Those who adopt such double standards have not fully absorbed the faith and spirit of Islam or appreciated its fundamental principles. The first among these is the belief that "there is no deity except God". This is the basis that lays down the principles that God is the only and the ultimate ruling and legislating authority in the world.

Here, one sees the Qur'ān outlining part of the battle plan for the Muslims, appropriate for the prevailing situation when they were surrounded not only by countless external threats but also by the hypocrites and their Jewish allies inside Madinah. It first cautions them: *"Believers, be fully prepared against danger."* You should be on the alert, watch all your enemies, especially those within your ranks who discourage you. These will presently be identified.

"And go to war either in small groups or all together..." The advice here is either to fight in small contingents or as a full fighting force, as the battle dictates. Solo fighters are easily targeted and taken by an enemy that is widely deployed, especially within the Muslim community itself, as was the case with the hypocrites and the Jews of Madinah.

An Eye for Gain

> *There are indeed among you such as would lag behind, and then, if a calamity befalls you, say, "God has bestowed His favours upon me in that I was not present with them!" But if good fortune comes to you from God, he is sure to say — just as if there had never been any question of love between you and him — "Oh, would that I had been with them; I would surely have had a [share in a] mighty triumph."* (Verses 72-73)

The Muslims are advised to mobilise themselves into either small parties or as a fully-fledged fighting force, and not to allow any of their numbers to dither or lag

behind, as often happened in practice. They must be vigilant, not only with respect to their external enemy, but also towards those among them who stayed behind and who discouraged others from joining this *jihād.*

The Arabic term chosen here to denote the laggards' position is particularly potent and appropriate. It is a word that gives the impression of slowness, as if one stumbles when it is pronounced. Its sound gives a strong hint of the meaning it conveys. That, itself, is characteristic of the Qur'ān's powerful and stylistic prose.

The emphatic structure of the sentence also suggests that these foot draggers, and they were only a handful, were persistent and ardent in their pursuit. This indicates the serious effect their actions had had on the community. Hence, the Qur'ān focuses its attention on them and their intentions outlining, in its own uniquely graphic style, their abhorrent characteristics. Their character, intentions, and all their exploits and claims are exposed for all to see, as if being scrutinised under a microscope, revealing their secrets, aims and motives.

They are shown then, during the Prophet's time, as they are shown today to be hypocritical, weak, two-faced and small-minded. They perceive nothing other than their own immediate self-interests, nor do they ever look farther than their own limited and personal interests. They wish that life should revolve around a single focal point: themselves, which they never overlook.

They dither and prevaricate, but never speak in the open, trying, as it were, to play a balancing game. Their concept of gain and loss has more in common with that of the hypocrites and the small-minded.

They stay behind so that when Muslim fighters suffer a setback, which sometimes occurs, they rejoice and consider the fact that they were able to run away from the battlefield and dodge the test of faith. This is, then, their valuable prize. *"If calamity befalls you, [he would] say, `God has bestowed His favours upon me in that I was not present with them!'"* (Verse 72)

As they assess their position, they consider their evading the battle to be a blessing, and they feel no shame in attributing their decision to God whose commands they have neglected. Evading the obligation to fight, in such circumstances, can never be by the grace of God. This is never gained by disobeying Him, even if the eventual outcome is positive.

It can only be considered a prize by those who do not deal directly with God and who do not appreciate why God has created them. Such people do not translate their submission to God into practical obedience or into striving to serve His cause and to establish His order in human life. It is a prize in the eyes of those who do not aspire to higher levels than what is known to them on this earth; those who do not appreciate that sacrifice and striving for the establishment of God's order is a

privilege and an honour God bestows upon a select few. He, thus, elevates them in this life and liberates them from the shackles of their own weaknesses and the limitations of their world. He raises their sights to a higher life in which they are in, not under, control. Thus, God Almighty helps them to qualify for an abode closer to Him, one which is preserved for martyrs.

All human beings die, but martyrs who give their lives in God's cause are called upon to testify for God's faith. This is a great privilege bestowed by the grace of God.

If the situation is reversed and the Muslims, who are happy to fight and accept everything God gives them, are blessed with victory and the spoils of war, those who have stayed behind regret their action.

They look at it, from their narrow, worldly perspective, as a refusal to join a winning battle, according to their narrow and short-term understanding of victory and success. *"But if good fortune comes to you from God, he is sure to say — just as if there had never been any question of love between you and him — 'Oh, would that I had been with them; I would surely have had a [share in a] mighty triumph."* (Verse 73)

They describe their wish for trivial loot as a *"mighty triumph"*. Believers do not look with disdain at victory or reward; indeed they are urged to implore God specifically for them. Nor do believers wish for a hard test. On the contrary, they are encouraged to pray to God to save them from it. But a believer's overall view of such matters is different from that of a hypocrite's as depicted in these verses.

As already explained, believers do not wish for hardship. On the contrary, they appeal to be spared such hardship. But when called upon to fight for God's cause, they respond without hesitation, appealing to God to grant them either victory or martyrdom. Either eventuality is a Divine blessing and a great triumph. If granted martyrdom, a believer accepts God's choice and rejoices in that privilege, and if granted victory and spoils of war, he thanks God for His blessings and rejoices in the victory granted by God, not merely for his being spared.

This is the level to which God wishes to raise the Muslims when He cites to them the example of indecisive elements living in their midst aiming only to save themselves, so that they, the Muslims, may beware. From the warning and the motivation provided to the Muslim community, a human model of true Muslims emerges. This model is ever recurring in all communities and all generations. This model is painted in a true to life image, using only a few words. Furthermore, this model is seen in all stages of human history.

Therefore, the enduring moral that Muslims have to contemplate is that the existence of such half-hearted people in the community should not lead to despair but should rather make the community more vigilant. With more guidance, education and enlightenment, the community should seek to remedy the deficiency,

overcome the weakness and harmonise and integrate its progress and temper.

A Good Price for Life

The *sūrah* moves on, trying to shake these laggards and stimulate in them an ambition to gain the better and longer lasting rewards of the hereafter. It spurs them on to trade-in this life for the life to come, promising them God's grace and blessings in both worlds and a final outcome of either victory or martyrdom. *"Let them fight in God's cause — all who are willing to barter the life of this world for the life to come. To him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall grant a rich reward."* (Verse 74)

Islam recognises no legitimate fighting other than what is taken in support of God's cause. It does not accept fighting merely for material gain, dominance or glory, whether personal or national. Islam does not advocate fighting for the occupation of land or the domination of other communities. It does not approve of fighting which aims at the acquisition or control of industrial raw materials, or consumer markets or for capital and investment.

Islam does not promote fighting for the glory of a particular individual, dynasty, class, state, nation or race. The only fighting it approves of is that undertaken for God's cause, to establish His order and way of life in the world, and to ensure that humanity gains from its benefits, blessings and universal justice. Beyond that, everyone is free to choose one's beliefs, according to one's convictions, under the universal, humane and Divine system Islam advocates.

When a Muslim, fighting for such a purpose, is killed, he is a martyr and will be rewarded accordingly by God. If he fought for any other objective, he would not be considered a "martyr" and no reward will be stored for him with God. His reward, instead, will come from whatever other benefactor he chose to fight for. To call such people "martyrs" is false and constitutes an affront to God Almighty.

The verse is very specific that those seeking the hereafter in preference to material and immediate reward, should fight in the cause of God, and only then will they receive God's grace, whether they are killed or achieve victory. *"To him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall grant a rich reward."*

Thus, the Qur'ān uplifts the souls and characters of Muslims and fills them with hope in God's grace, whatever the outcome. It alleviates fear of death and temptation for booty, because life and booty mean nothing in comparison with God's grace. It seeks to dissuade Muslims from going for the losing transaction of trading-in the rewards of the life to come for those of the present life. Such a deal incurs inevitable loss, regardless of their victory or defeat on the battlefield. No comparison can be

made between these two types of reward.

Taking up the Cause of the Oppressed

Having portrayed the position of wavering Muslims, the *sūrah* goes on to address the whole Muslim community. It appeals to Muslims who are presumably sensitive to the cause of weaker men, women and children who suffered at the hands of the Makkan unbelievers. Had such weaker elements been able to migrate to Madinah, the land of Islam, they would have enjoyed protection and safety. These victims were seeking salvation and praying to God to rescue them from the clutches of oppression and aggression. The *sūrah* emphasises the nobility, honour and dignity of the purpose for which Muslims are called upon to fight without hesitation or vacillation. "*And why should you not fight in the cause of God and the utterly helpless men, women and children who are crying, 'Our Lord! Deliver us from this land whose people are oppressors, and send forth to us, out of Your grace, a protector, and send us one that will help us.'*" (Verse 75)

The *sūrah* enquires: How can believers hesitate to fight for God's cause and rescue helpless men, women and children whose poignant conditions stir believer's enthusiasm, dignity and emotion? These were hapless people, suffering the worst type of persecution because of their beliefs and religious convictions. Religious persecution is far more terrible than making away with material or personal possessions, because it strikes at the essence of human life to which all material considerations are secondary.

The image of vulnerable and heart-broken women and children is heart-rending, and so is that of the defenceless elderly who are unable to defend their beliefs. These images alone are powerful enough to spur believers into action, and so the Qur'ān, profoundly and effectively, denounces the inclination to ignore such calls for help.

It is appropriate here to comment on the concept of homeland and nationality in Islam. The land *"whose people are oppressors"* which, in this context, would be considered hostile and from which Muslims are obliged to rescue their oppressed fellow-Muslims, was Makkah, the land of the Muhājirīn (those who had immigrated to Madinah). The urgency of the call to go and fight the unbelievers is addressed to these Makkan immigrants who had settled in Madinah.

The fact that Makkah was their original homeland did not make any difference, since it was not ruled by the laws of Islam and since the Muslims therein were being persecuted for their beliefs and religious convictions. On the contrary, it had become a "land of hostility" which they should not defend but should, in fact, attack in order to rescue their fellow-Muslims. Muslims fight to defend the faith. The homeland they fight for is where the laws of Islam are upheld, and the land they protect is the "land

of Islam" which adopts Islam as its way of life. All other concepts of nationality or citizenship are alien to Islam and emanate from ignorant, non-Islamic beliefs.

Satan's Feeble Cunning

Then follows another psychological touch to inspire enthusiasm and vigour, and to define the values and objectives for which each side is fighting. *"Those who believe fight in the cause of God, and those who reject the faith fight in the cause of evil. Fight, then, against the friends of Satan. Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan."* (Verse 76)

In one stroke, people are set apart, lines are drawn and objectives are clearly identified, as mankind are divided into two distinct and separate camps. *"Those who believe fight in the cause of God..."* and *"... those who reject the faith fight in the cause of evil."* (Verse 76)

Believers fight in order to uphold God's order and establish His laws and justice "among people" in the name of God Almighty, rather than under any other banner. They acknowledge and attest that God alone is the Lord and, therefore, He is the Ruler.

Unbelievers, however, fight in the cause of evil, advocating various ideologies and legal systems, other than that of God Almighty. They uphold various values and standards that are different from those laid down by God. In this contest, the believers stand supported and protected by God. The unbelievers, with their various beliefs, ideologies, values, and methods, rely on Satan's protection and support. Collectively, they are his followers and supporters.

God instructs the believers to confront Satan's supporters and not be afraid of their power or cunning: *"Fight, then, against the friends of Satan. Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan."* (Verse 76)

Thus, Muslims stand on solid ground with their backs well protected. They are confident that they are fighting God's battle, from which they expect no personal, national, racial or ethnic gain or favour. It is a fight that is purely dedicated to God and His way of life. They are also convinced that they are facing enemies who are in the wrong and who are fighting to replace truth with falsehood. Enemies who are seeking to impose non-Islamic laws and systems — and all human systems are non-Islamic — instead of those of God Almighty. They advocate human injustice — and all human dominance is unjust — in place of God's justice which they are instructed to establish in society.

Muslims go into battle with the confidence that God is supporting them and that their enemies are feeble because they are supported by Satan, and Satan's powers are weak. Thus, the outcome of the battle becomes clear in the believer's mind. Its

conclusion is settled before it even starts. If, subsequently, a believer is martyred, he is happy with the outcome, or if he triumphs and lives to see victory with his own eyes, he is likewise assured of a great reward.

Such understanding of the reality of the situation, in both cases of victory or defeat, has been the source of many miraculous experiences on the battlefield both by the first Muslim generation and throughout Islam's history. There is no need to cite any specific incidents here, for they are noted and well documented elsewhere. Nonetheless, such understanding was in part responsible for the Muslim successes over their enemies, already referred to in this volume, brought about by upholding the Divine order. The establishment of this concept represents some of the effort the Qur'ān devotes to the education and enlightenment of the early Muslims as it guides them through their confrontations with their more powerful enemies. Those possessed material and arms superiority but were weak and backward in their understanding and concepts, and so were overcome.

This task, as we can see, was not easy and was certainly not achieved by mere words. It was a persistent, relentless effort aimed at defeating selfishness and love of life, regardless of the price. Furthermore, it aimed at correcting people's misconceptions of gain and loss.

Wrong Feeling, Wrong Timing

The *sūrah* continues to express surprise at the actions of some Muslims. There were people, said to be over-zealous Makkans, who, while facing persecution in Makkah, asked to be allowed to fight the unbelievers. For reasons known only to God Almighty, some of which we will discuss shortly, they had not been permitted to take up arms against their tormentors. However, when fighting was made obligatory, following the establishment of the Muslim state in Madinah, and once God had decided it was advantageous for Muslims and for all mankind, some of those very Muslims, as the Qur'ān says, *"stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God — or in even greater awe — and said, 'Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!'"* (Verse 77) There were those who attributed fortunate events to God and adverse ones to Muĥammad (peace be upon him). Others expressed obedience to the Prophet in his presence but agreed among themselves to something different once they left his company, and yet others who spread whatever rumours they heard regarding war and peace.

The Qur'ān vividly portrays the state of mind of all these groups. It corrects for them, as well as for others after them, the errors of their understanding of the realities of life and death, fate and destiny, good and evil, benefit and harm, gain and loss, standards and values. It elaborates all these basic facts in a clear and effective

manner.

> *Are you not aware of those who have been told, "Hold back your hands [from fighting', and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]'"? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God — or in even greater awe — and said, "Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!" Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God- fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high. "Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, "This is from God," whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you!" Say, "All is from God." What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? Whatever good happens to you is from God; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself We have sent you as a Messenger to all mankind. Enough is God for a witness. He who obeys the Messenger obeys God thereby. As for those who turn away — We have not sent you to be their keeper. And they say, "We do obey you," but when they leave you, some of them devise, in secret, something different from what you advocate. All the while God records what they thus devise in secret. Leave them, then, alone, and place your trust in God. Sufficient is God for a guardian. Will they not, then, try to understand the Qur'ān? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction! If any matter pertaining to peace or war comes to their knowledge, they make it known to all and sundry; whereas, if they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it. Were it not for God's bounty to you, and His grace, all but a few of you would certainly have followed Satan.* (Verses 77-83)

These groups, described in the four sections above, may already have been referred to in earlier verses, beginning with verse 72. This would mean that they refer to that group of hypocrites who said and did whatever is described here. Initially, we were more inclined to go along with this interpretation because the hypocrites' qualities are unmistakable in what these verses describe, and because such action and behaviour is closer to their nature and reputation. However, the first of these sections, dealing with *"those who have been told, 'Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]'? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them... "*, suggests that it refers to a group of Makkan Muslims whose faith was somewhat lacking. Although this is a quality of hypocrisy, they are not themselves hypocrites. Each of the other three passages describes a particular group of hypocrites who had infected the Muslim community at the time. Taken together, the passages describe the hypocrites in general, categorising their actions and behaviour.

The reason for the interpretation I am putting forward is that some Muslims, from

among those who had migrated from Makkah, were over-zealous at times in their desire to confront the unbelievers when they were still in Makkah. Yet at that time, permission to fight was withheld. They were told: *"Hold back your hands [from fighting', and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt."*

We may take into consideration here the suggestion made to the Prophet by the seventy-two Muslims who were party to the second `Aqabah Covenant (622 AD) to wipe out "the people of Minā", and his reply: "We have not yet been ordered to fight." But even when we do this, we cannot include this group of early Muslims from Madinah who were party to the `Aqabah Covenant among the hypocrites discussed here. Nor can we include them among the faint-hearted, described in the first section. For, not the slightest hint of hypocrisy or weakness was ever known about that select group of Muslims.

The most likely explanation is, therefore, that this group of verses refers to some Makkan Muslims who, once safely settled in Madinah, lost heart and their appetite to fight. The other attributes do not relate to them but rather to the hypocrites *per se.* It is inconceivable that any of those immigrants, i.e. the Muhājirīn, would say or do what the verses here talk about, such as attributing evil to the Prophet or declaring their obedience while resolving not to obey. Perhaps the most that they were guilty of was talking publicly of sensitive matters relating to war and security. This was a result of their lack of discipline rather than duplicity or plain hypocrisy.

The fact is that we are unable to offer a definitive analysis of these verses. None of the information relating to their interpretation is specific, including that in the first section which is said to refer to some Makkan Muslims or to a group of hypocrites.

It is more prudent, therefore, to exonerate the Makkan Muslims from any unwillingness to fight, from acting against the best interests of their fellow-Muslims, as also from attributing evil events to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and harbouring thoughts of disobedience to him. Moreover, anyone who follows the thread of the Qur'ānic text will find it exceedingly difficult to break its flow, particularly when he is well familiar with the Qur'ānic mode of expression.

A Very Strange Question

> *Are you not aware of those who have been told, "Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]"? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God— or in even greater awe — and said, "Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!" Say, "Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God- fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high."* (Verses 77-78)

God Almighty expresses surprise at those Muslims who, while still in Makkah facing persecution and abuse and were restrained from fighting, for reasons known to God Almighty, were enthusiastically vying for confrontation. Yet when the appropriate time, appointed by God, and the right circumstances arrived, and fighting was duly prescribed, some of them were so alarmed and terrified to the point of fearing the enemy they were ordered to fight. Heart-broken, shocked and terrified, all they could say was: *"Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight?..."* A strange question to come from a believer, but an indication of the confusion regarding the obligations required by Islam and regarding its role in life. The enquiry is followed by a pathetic and plaintive wish: *"If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!"* They would rather have had more time before taking up such a heavy and terrifying burden.

The most zealous and reckless of people can also be the most frightened and most easily overpowered when the situation becomes critical. This may, in fact, be the rule rather than the exception, because over-enthusiasm, recklessness and fanatic fervour are often motivated by a lack of judgement of the task ahead, rather than courage, patience or determination. Inspired by impetuosity and a lack of stamina some people are forced to move and seek action and victory in any way and by any means, regardless of the cost. However, once such people come face to face with the task in hand, it looks greater than they had anticipated and more demanding than they had thought. Thus, they become the first to lose heart, to panic and crumple. It is only those who are persevering and restrained, who patiently prepare for battle and who fully appreciate the weight of the task ahead, that endure, remain steadfast and prepare properly for the mission. Reckless zealots may take such people to be weak and sneer at their deliberation and consideration. The battle, however, will decide which of the two groups is the stronger and the more far-sighted.

Most probably, the *sūrah* is referring to that group of Muslims whose dignity did not allow them to tolerate harassment and humiliation in Makkah and who, thus, requested that the Prophet grant them permission to fight. The Prophet, in such matters, was complying with God's instructions of restraint, patience, careful preparation and education, awaiting the right moment. But once they were safely settled in Madinah and securely living out of harm's way, they no longer saw any justification or, at least, no great urgency to fight the enemy.

> *When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God — or in even greater awe — and said, "Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!"* (Verse 77)

These people may have been sincere believers, as seen from their plaintive appeals. No wonder that underdeveloped faith, confusion and a lack of clear understanding of Islam's true mission in the world, should result in such a wavering attitude. Islam's mission is more than the mere preservation of individuals, nations

or countries. It is, first and foremost, the firm establishment of God's order and just system all over the world. It is the institution of a supreme authority that allows no impediments to the spread of God's faith and which refuses to deprive people from receiving God's call wherever they may be. It ensures that no one is persecuted in their livelihood or freedom of action, or indeed in any other way, as a result of the religious belief they have freely chosen. Safety and security at Madinah, even if one accepts these were fully guaranteed, did not, however, mean the Muslims' mission was fulfilled and that *jihād* was no longer required.

It is not surprising that weak faith should produce such an attitude. Weak faith prevents a person from viewing matters objectively, listening only to God's commands, considering them both cause and effect, reason and result, providing the ultimate authority, whether one understands their purpose or not. Nor is it surprising that blurred understanding should result in a stance that the Qur'ān firmly rejects. It is only a clear understanding of Islam that enables a believer to identify Islam's mission in the world and his own role as God's instrument to be used for whatever purpose He may think fit.

It is impossible to say why the Muslims in Makkah were not permitted the use of force to prevent or resist persecution and oppression, even though many of them could not be considered weak or powerless. In fact, some were quite able to defend themselves, despite their small number.

Nor is it possible to be completely certain why the Muslims were instructed to observe their prayers and to give alms and be patient, rather than resort to force, even though some of them were subjected to unbearable forms of persecution. Indeed, some died under torture while others could only escape torture by retracting their faith, either in pretence or in the face of force.

Possible Reasons for Restraint

It would be presumptuous to state what the exact reasons behind God's enforced order to the Muslims to restrain themselves and not resort to armed conflict might have been. If we were to offer certain reasons and say that these were real ones, there being no other purpose, then we would be placing ourselves in an untenable position in relation to God. Analysis or conjecture may help reveal the real reasons or it may not, but believers must refrain from such guesswork regarding any instructions or rulings the reasons or justifications for which have not been expressly given. God knows they are for the good of mankind. No matter how much speculation the human mind may make regarding the reasons behind certain Divine rulings or the way in which they ought to be implemented or exercised, it all remains speculative. No matter how confident, incisive or knowledgeable one is, one can never state with certainty what the Divine reason or wisdom might be. This deference to God Almighty is imperative. It is an essential element in differentiating between the reality and the nature of knowledge that is God-given and that which is the result of human analysis or understanding.

It is from this perspective of reverence that one considers the reasons and the wisdom behind the fact that *jihād* had to wait until the Muslims were settled in Madinah before it was made obligatory. The views advanced here are mere suggestions. The full and real reasons are known only to God who has chosen not to give us a clear statement in this respect.

The following are some personal views which may be right or wrong, open to discussion and revision, and are intended only as reflections on God's rulings as provided and assisted by events and developments.

i. One reason could be that the Makkan period was one of training, educating and preparing a particular group of people under certain conditions. One of the aims of such a programme is to discipline the Arab mind to persevere and endure personal and collective hardship as a means to transcend personal egos. One's own self and immediate community should no longer be the focus and prime movers in one's life. People needed to be taught restraint and self-control and how not to react with immediate rage and anger, as was their nature. They needed to learn to behave as members of an organised society with a central leadership to be consulted and obeyed in all matters, regardless of how different that was from their customs and traditions. This was the cornerstone in remodelling the Arab character to establish a civilised, orderly, non-tribal Muslim society that recognises a governing leadership.

ii. Another possible reason is that peaceful action was more effective in that particular Arab society of the Quraysh, which attached much importance to self-image and honour. The use of force in such a situation could only harden attitudes and result in fresh bloody grudges, reminiscent of the famous inter-Arab feuds of Dāĥis and al-Ghabrā', and of al-Basūs which raged for many years, wiping out complete tribes. Such a new conflict would always be associated in the Arab memory with Islam as the cause of vengeance and bloodshed rather than Islam as a universal Divine mission. The basic essence of Islam would, in that case, be forever obscured and obliterated.

iii. There was also the need to avoid a bloodbath within every Arab household in Makkah since there was no organised authority perpetrating the persecution of Muslim converts. The harassment was unsystematic, following no specific order. Every household dealt with their converts as they saw fit. Prescription of armed confrontation in such circumstances would mean battles and massacres in every home for which Islam would be blamed. In fact, the Quraysh propaganda, spread during the pilgrimage and trading seasons, was already blaming Islam for family splits, feuds and divisions among the Arabs even before the use of force was eventually permitted.

iv. Another reason for the delay in prescribing *jihād* by force of arms could be God's prior knowledge that many of the tormentors and perpetrators of maltreatment against the Muslims would, one day soon, themselves be converts and ardent defenders, indeed leaders, of Islam. Was not `Umar ibn al-Khaţţāb

one such person?

v. Another reason could be that Arab tribal chivalry was known to provoke sympathy with the weak and the oppressed when they persevere in the face of adversity, especially if some of these hailed from the noble sections of society. This is borne out in several incidents including that whereby Ibn al-Dughunnah tried to persuade Abū Bakr, a noble man, not to leave Makkah and offered him protection, seeing it as a shame on all the Arabs that he should have to emigrate. Another incident was the repeal of the boycott on Hāshim, Muĥammad's clan, and the ending of their siege in the Hāshimite quarters in Makkah, after an extended period of starvation and hardship. In other ancient civilisations, persecution might have led to the adulation of the oppressor and further humiliation for the oppressed, but not in Arab society.

vi. It could have been due to the small number of Muslims at the time and their confinement in Makkah when Islam had not spread widely in Arabia, and the neutral stand that other Arab tribes would take in an internal conflict within Makkah. Confrontation could very well lead to the annihilation of the small band of Muslim converts, even, if they were to kill twice as many as their own number, and the infidels would thus prevail. In this case, the religion of Islam, which was meant to be a universal way of life and a practical and realistic system, would no longer exist.

vii. In the meantime, there was no great urgency to ignore all these factors and prescribe resistance and the use of force because the main objective of Islam at that time had been achieved. It was the very existence of Islam as represented by the person of the Prophet Muĥammad and the protection he enjoyed from the Hāshim clan. His antagonists would be hit hard. The existing tribal system encouraged other tribes, who might contemplate attacking Muĥammad, to avoid a clash with the Hāshim clan. Thus, Muĥammad, personally, was able, under the protection of the Hāshim clan, to speak and spread his ideas and beliefs openly. He did not have to hide them and no one dared prevent him from talking to people at the Ka`bah or al-Safā or at their public meetings and gatherings. No one would dare stop him speak, or kidnap, incarcerate or eliminate him. Nor could any one restrict or dictate what he could or could not say in public. His opponents asked him to desist from attacking and defaming their gods, but he refused; they appealed to him not to criticise or condemn the religion of their forefathers and again he refused. He rejected the various compromises they offered him. All in all, the foundations and existence of Islam, as represented by the Prophet himself and his active advocacy of Islam, in various ways and places, were taking full root under the protection of the Hāshim clan. These positive factors which were generally conducive to the spread of the call of Islam, could not be readily ignored, and they provided the environment in which there was no immediate urgency for all-out confrontation.

Taken together, the above facts represent, in the present author's view, some of the reasons why God instructed the Muslims in Makkah to refrain from the use of force and instead to concentrate on establishing prayer and paying *zakāt* as a way of perfecting their education, enlightenment and preparation. This also provided the Muslims with the opportunity to benefit from all the resources available in that environment while awaiting the Divine instruction to fight when the right moment presented itself. Furthermore, it enabled them to extricate themselves from any hint of seeking personal profit in going for all-out confrontation; this so that the whole matter would be devoted to God and His noble cause. Meanwhile, Islam had become "a reality" and it was being preserved and protected.

Be that as it may, there were restless Muslims in Makkah urging for a fight, awaiting the moment they were given the go-ahead.

What Does Death Signify?

> *When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God or in even greater awe – and said, "Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!"* (Verse 77)

The mere existence of this group created disruption and discord within the Muslim community as some became fearful and dismayed at the prospect of having to fight their enemy, while others remained calm and confident. The latter received the imposition, of jihād duty with poise, serenity, determination and even enthusiasm. Their enthusiasm was well placed because it was necessary for the proper execution of their obligation. It was not mere recklessness that evaporated immediately on coming face to face with danger.

The Qur'ān deals with these phenomena in its own inimitable style: *"Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the lift to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you small be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high.'"* (Verses 77-78)

They fear death and love life, pathetically pressing their desire that God should give them more time and allow them more of this world's enjoyments. Hence, the Qur'ān goes to the root of the problem, revealing the true understanding of life and death: *"Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world...."*

All worldly enjoyments, and the world as a whole, are ephemeral, let alone a period of days, weeks, months or years. What good is there, in granting a short while longer in life if all the pleasures of human life throughout the world and throughout all ages are worthless? What can these people hope to achieve in such a short time when, in reality all life in this world is short?

"Whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing." (Verse 77) This life is not the be-all and end-all. It is merely a stage of existence beyond which there is a life hereafter full of boundless and endless delights that are *"best for all who are God-fearing"* The reference here to consciousness and fear of God is quite appropriate because it is God, not men, who should be respected and feared. Those whose hearts are filled with fear of God shall have no fear of anyone else; no one can harm them if God wishes them no harm.

"None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth." (Verse 77) There shall be no injustice, prejudice or unfair treatment. Whatever is lost in this life shall be generously compensated for in the final account in the life to come with full justice and appreciation.

Nevertheless, some people wish for longer life, even though they believe in the life to come and look forward to its precious rewards. This is more so during the early days of one's commitment to Islam, as was the case for those Muslims.

At this point, a final touch gives the true understanding of the nature of life, death, destiny and fate, and relates all this to the obligation to fight. *"Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high."* Death is inevitable, and certain to come at its appointed moment. It is not affected by war or peace, or the security of one's position, nor is its timing affected by whether Muslims are ordered to fight or not. The two events are separate and unrelated. Death is only dependent on its appointed time as determined by God Almighty. Any wish to defer *jihād,* as also fear of other people have no significance in this regard. With this, the Qur'ān takes care of all the suspicions that may linger on in our minds regarding this matter, and removes all the fear that results from misunderstanding this basic concept.

This does not mean that people should not take precautions, as best as they can. God has already urged the Muslims to beware of their enemies, and elsewhere in this *sūrah,* He advised specific precautions while praying in the battlefield, and instructed the Muslims to equip and prepare themselves for fighting. But this is quite unrelated to the predetermination and timing of death. Taking precautions and preparing adequately for battle is an order to be executed and has its own obvious and hidden purposes as determined by God's will. Likewise, formulating a proper concept of death and the fact that it occurs at its appointed time, regardless of whatever steps one may take to prevent it, is also an instruction that must be obeyed. It has its own clear and implicit purposes. All this is characteristic of the Islamic system which is moderate and well balanced. It takes all factors into account, ensuring harmony between them all. This is true Islam and this is how it educates and enlightens its followers, individually and collectively.

A Highly Prejudiced Attitude

At this point, attention turns to another of the many different groups making up

the Muslim community, without any obvious break in the flow of the text or in the arguments.

> *Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, "This is from God," whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you!" Say, All is from God. "What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? Whatever good happens to you is from God; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself. We have sent you as a Messenger to all mankind. Enough is God for a witness. He who obeys the Messenger obeys God thereby. As for those who turn away – We have not sent you to be their keeper.* (Verses 78-80)

The attitude of these people can be understood in a number of different ways:

1. They considered the Prophet himself an evil portent who brought them hardship and misfortune. Whenever they suffered a drought or a bad harvest or were defeated in battle, they would attribute the causes to the Prophet. But they attributed good fortunes to God.
2. They deliberately set out to vilify the Prophet in order to criticise his leadership and undermine, in particular, his instructions to the Muslims to go and fight. Instead of admitting to their weakness and lack of courage, they took a perverse approach by pretending to credit God with their fortunes and blaming their difficulties and setbacks on the Prophet and his instructions. Needless to say, all the fortune and the hardship they mean are of the immediate, short-term type.
3. They entertained a real misconception of what happens to them and to other people in this life, and how this relates to the will of God. This makes for a further lack of understanding of the nature and status of the Prophet's commands and the nature of his relationship with God.

The third explanation, if correct, may apply to that group of Makkan immigrants whose misunderstanding of the reality of death and fate had led them to fear other people as much as they feared God, or even more. It prompted them to cry out: *"Our Lord! Why have You ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!"* (Verse 77) Nevertheless, it may be more accurate to say that the reference here is to another group which satisfies all three criteria.

The issue being discussed here represents part of a larger one, referred to in the history of polemics and philosophy worldwide under the heading: "Fate and Predestination" or "Predetermination and Free Will". It is mentioned in the context of correcting certain misconceptions, in a straightforward, unambiguous and clear way. Let us look at it as presented in the Qur'ān.

> *Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, "This is from God," whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you!" Say, "All is from God."*

What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? (Verse 78)

God Almighty is the original and sole cause of world events affecting the universe and humankind, and He is the cause of people's actions. People have the power to intend and try but actions only take place with the will of God Almighty. Hence, to ascribe the instigation of fortune or misfortune, or their occurrence, to the Prophet, who is human after all, is erroneous and a sign of complete ignorance.

Humans may wish and seek, by all the means God has put at their disposal, to bring about goodness and good fortune, but the achievement of such wishes only takes place by God's will. In reality, there is no other will capable of making things and events happen or bringing things about in the world. Thus, goodness and good fortune are acts of Divine will, brought about through human means and inclinations.

The same applies to evil or misfortune. It is God's will and power that make them happen. The Qur'ānic statement affirms that God is the ultimate origin of all that happens.

The next statement affirms another truth, quite independent of the previous one, viewed from a completely different perspective: "*Whatever good happens to you is from God; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.*" (Verse 79)

God has ordained a system and laid down a way of life, indicating the means of good and the means of evil. He has shown people the good, encouraging them to take it up, and warned against evil. When man adheres to this system, seeking the good and avoiding evil, God will help and guide him. God says: "*Those who exert themselves for Our cause We will guide to Our ways.*" (29: 69) In this process man is given a real reward, regardless of whether people see this as gain or loss. It is a reward from God who has laid down the rules, concepts and laws of good and evil. When man refuses to adhere to God's guidance and does not seek the good or keep away from evil, misfortune is inflicted upon him, in this life or in the life to come, or both, and he only has himself to blame for not heeding God's guidance.

It is quite clear that this is yet another interpretation, one quite different from the preceding one. However, this does not affect the original assertion that good and evil only happen by God's will and power, as He is the origin and creator of all things, regardless of the human contribution or role in what actually takes place.[13]

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[13] Regarding the issue of Predestination and Free Will, which these verses bring to our attention, and the extent to which the human will may affect events, and the reconciliation of man's accountability with an overriding Divine will which creates and determines man's actions, etc., the Qur'ānic view is as follows: Everything happens by God's will and predestination. Man wills and acts and is accountable for his will and his actions. The Qur'ān is the word of God and can never be self-contradictory, and there must, therefore, be a certain logical relationship between the two positions. Man's will and actions must extend over a certain area wide enough to make him accountable and deserving of reward, without bringing him into conflict with the Divine will and predestination. But how is this possible? The answer is that there is no answer, because the human mind is not sufficiently

The Limits of the Prophet's Role

The *sūrah* goes on to explain the nature of the Prophet's mission and its limitations. It also accounts for his actions and attitude towards people, and their's to him. Ultimately, it refers the whole matter to God Almighty. It says: *"We have sent you as a Messenger to all mankind. Enough is God for a witness.* (Verse 79) *He who obeys the Messenger obeys God thereby. As for those who turn away — We have not sent you to be their keeper."* (Verse 80)

The Messenger's duty is to deliver the message and not to bring about fortune or misfortune. That is a matter for God to decide and He is witness, and a sufficient witness at that, to the fact that He sent the Messenger to carry out that mission.

Those who obey the Messenger obey God; there is no distinction, in this context, between God and His Messenger or between what God says and what the Messenger says. Those who reject the Messenger and walk away from him will be referred to God for punishment. The Messenger is not commissioned to compel people to believe or accept the faith, or to prevent them from committing errors or disobedience. To do so is not part of his brief nor is it within his power.

Thus, the Qur'ān corrects the Muslims' concept, affirming that everything happens by God's will and predestination. All good and evil, viewed by whatever means, originate with God, because nothing happens, occurs or is created by anyone else but God. All the good that comes people's way originates with God because it is a consequence of His order and guidance, and the evil that befalls them is due to their own departure from God's guidance.

The Messenger's sole status is that of Messenger. He neither creates nor initiates things and events. He does not vie with God for a share of Godhead, His sovereignty or His essential attribute of creating and causing things and events. He delivers what God reveals to Him, which makes obeying him tantamount to obeying God. In reality, there is no way of obeying God other than by obeying His Messenger who has delivered his message fully and clearly. He is not obliged to cause infidels to follow God's guidance or to protect them against deviation.

Thus, facts are stated simply, clearly and unequivocally to articulate the concepts and reassure the mind. This process of teaching and enlightening the Muslim community was part of the necessary preparation for the great role it was required to play.

Contemplating the Qur'ān

capable of comprehending how God Almighty operates.

The *sūrah* goes on to portray, in brief statements, the state of another group of Muslims, or it may be a group of hypocrites, highlighting with such repugnance new aspects of their behaviour. This is also given as part of the process of educating and guiding the rest of the Muslims.

> *And they say, "We do obey you," but when they leave you, some of them devise, in secret, something different from what you advocate. All the while God records what they thus devise in secret. Leave them, then, alone, and place your trust in God. Sufficient is God for a guardian. Will they not, then, try to understand the Qur'ān? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!* (Verses 81-82)

These people would sit with God's Messenger, listen to him as he recited the Qur'ān and respond in his presence by saying: *"We do obey you."* They would say this without any hesitation, qualification or objection. But no sooner had they left the Messenger than some of them would change their position, conspire to act differently and seek to extricate themselves from all obligations.

It is also possible that the Qur'ān is describing the state of the Muslim community as a whole, with the exception of a particular group that follows a different line. This would mean that the Muslims, as a whole, would respond to the Messenger by affirming their obedience but a certain group would change their stance immediately upon leaving his company. The picture is one of evident dislocation within Muslim ranks. Those people actually joined the Muslim ranks, and their behaviour was bound to harm the whole Muslim community at a time when it was fighting hard on several fronts.

God reassures the Prophet and his sincere followers that He is monitoring the treacherous elements. This certainly boosts the Muslims' confidence and puts their minds at rest that no harm shall reach them. The assertion is also a threat to the schemers that they will not succeed nor will they escape punishment. *"God records what they thus devise in secret."* (Verse 81)

God's advice to the Prophet in dealing with the hypocrites was to take them at face value, rather than judge them by their intentions, and to ignore and overlook their behaviour. Eventually, the approach wore them out, debilitated their effect and dissipated their influence. The plan, therefore, was to: *"Leave them, then, alone...."* (Verse 81) But also to lean on God and trust Him: *"... and place your trust in God. Sufficient is God for a guardian."* (Verse 81) Indeed, God is sufficient for a guardian and protector. Whoever is under His guardianship is fully protected and shielded against any scheming or conspiracy.

It seems as though the renegades doubted the source of the Prophet's instructions,

and believed that he was the Qur'ān's author. Once such suspicion is entertained even for one moment, the instructions lose their authority altogether. The credibility of the Messenger depends completely on the firm and total belief that God is the origin of what he delivers, and that he does not act out of personal whim or desire. Hence, the strongly repeated emphasis of this fact.

At this point, the Qur'ān offers them a proposition that indicates God's highest possible regard for man, his intelligence and insight, bestowed upon him by God Himself. It invites them to judge the Qur'ān by their own intelligence and intellectual appreciation. It points out the proper approach to adopt and identifies the key aspect by which they can judge the Qur'ān. When they do this, they will have ample, irrefutable evidence that the Qur'ān originates with God Almighty: *"Will they not, then, try to understand the Qur'ān? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!"* (Verse 82)

This invitation to reflect on the Qur'ān and consider it carefully is particularly significant. Full and absolute harmony and integrity is an unmistakeable feature of the Qur'ān. It is a feature that allows different people and generations to benefit by the Qur'ān according to, and within, their respective aptitudes, education, experience and piety.

This verse addresses all people and all generations, everyone of whom is capable of appreciating as much of the harmony and congruity of the Qur'ān as their ability, education, experience and piety allow. The first generation of Muslims were being addressed with ideas they understood and were able to verify within their own existing intellectual environment.

A Pointer to the Author of the Qur'ān

The harmony and consistency of the Qur'ān are clear methods of expression and literary style. In human expression and language one comes across various levels of excellence, power, lucidity and brilliance, as well as constant fluctuation in mood. This is clearly apparent when we examine the works of any literary personality, thinker, artist, politician or military commander, etc. Variation and inconsistency are inherent features of human expression and behaviour.

The opposite is true of the Qur'ānic literary style. It is harmonious and consistent. The surpassing excellence of the language of the Qur'ān maintains the same scope and level of perfection throughout without any of the fluctuations or alterations known in human language. The Qur'ān carries the stamp of its origin, reflects the fact that it comes from God and points to the Creator who is not affected by changes and conditions.

Perfect consistency and harmony are also manifested in the message of the Qur'ān and the system it outlines. It is a message of education and enlightenment for human souls and societies. It is a system of organisation and discipline for individual and collective human activity in all walks of life throughout history. It is a message for the guidance of human understanding itself and for the harnessing of all human faculties for the enhancement of that understanding. It is a system for co-ordinating and harmonising human beings of all societies, generations and phases and the world in which they exist; between man's life here and in the hereafter. It also regulates the countless ramifications and consequences of that relationship in the life of every individual and the life of mankind as a whole.

The difference between Divine and human proficiency is evident enough with respect to linguistic and artistic expression; it is even more evident in relation to thought, regulation and law-making. Human theories and doctrines remain typically human, influenced by partial vision and transient conditions as well as a lack of understanding of the inherent contradictions that may exist. This is bound to lead, sooner or later, to conflict within the various elements of any theory or doctrine. It could also cause damage to certain aspects of the human personality which had been ignored. Numerous deficiencies and paradoxes emerge as a result of limited human understanding and ignorance of what the future holds, in addition to man's inadequate comprehension of the present. The Qur'ānic approach is totally different, being comprehensive and perfect, with firm, solid and universal foundations and criteria that allow perpetual motion and progress.

Examination of these aspects may not be available to everyone or to every generation, and it is certain that people will appreciate them at varying levels of understanding, each generation making its contribution in one or more fields of knowledge or experience. However, beyond all these human differences, a universally agreed repertoire of understanding and knowledge accumulates. The essence of such knowledge accumulation is that the language of the Qur'ān is not the product of any human being. Human literary excellence is one thing and the Qur'ān is a totally different thing. It is a perfectly made piece of consistent, coherent and homogeneous composition, even though people may differ greatly in their understanding of the extent of such harmony.

In these verses God refers that sceptic group, and everyone else besides, to the results of their own reflection. Indeed He invites all people in all generations to judge the Qur'ān, on the basis of their common understanding. This is sufficient to reaffirm the fact that the Qur'ān can only be from God. It could not have originated from anyone else.

The Role of Human Understanding

It may be useful at this point to reflect very briefly on the role of human comprehension with respect to this particular point, and with respect to religion as a whole. The honour God has granted to human beings in this context ought not to tempt man to become arrogant or exceed safe boundaries. If he does, then he will go too far astray.

These Qur'ānic exhortations, and their scope, are so often misunderstood. Some Muslim intellectuals, past and present, go so far as to grant the human mind the privilege of the final word in the interpretation of religious rules and principles, elevating man's judgement to that of God Almighty, or giving man an overriding authority over God's legislation.

The truth is rather different. The human intellect is a great faculty, so highly respected by God Almighty that He made it the means by which man recognises Islam as being a God-given religion. Certain phenomena arc easy to comprehend and they are, by themselves, sufficient evidence that Islam originates with God Almighty. Once man understands this profound truth, the same rationale leads him to accept Islam in its totality, regardless of whether or not he is able to identify or recognise the hidden purpose of its individual rules. Since it originates from God, it has a definite purpose. Furthermore, the human mind does not stand rival to God. It is certainly not qualified to judge God's wisdom, because its capacity for comprehension remains limited. It cannot look at any question from all angles, neither for a single moment nor for the rest of time.

On the other hand, God's legislation proceeds from an all- encompassing view and no judgement on it, or on any of its established rulings, should be entrusted to the human intellect. The most that the human mind can aspire to achieve is to comprehend the Divine message and how it applies to different situations. It cannot determine its purpose and the wisdom behind it. That a Divine rule serves the interests of the community is an undoubted fact, because it emanates from God. It is when no revealed text is available, with respect to new issues, that the human mind may exercise judgement. We have already pointed out that reference must initially he made to God and His Messenger. In addition to trying to understand the text, this is the other area for the application of human powers of deduction and reasoning, or *ijtihād.* The human intellect is not to be used to determine the purpose of Divine statements and rulings but its greatest arena, which is a vast arena indeed, is the understanding of the laws of nature and life and the pursuit of excellence in the material world.

We must give the human intellect the credit and reverence God has granted it, within its sphere of excellence, and not more than that. When we exaggerate its importance, we are liable to lose direction and proceed without guidance.

Proper Method of Deduction

The *sūrah* now portrays another group, or perhaps it only describes another practice by a particular group of Muslims. *"If any matter pertaining to peace or war comes to their knowledge, they make it known to all and sundry; whereas, if they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it. Were it not for God's bounty to you, and His grace, all but a few of you would certainly have followed Satan."* (Verse 83)

The description is that of a group within the Muslim community who lacked discipline and who underestimated the effects of rumour in weakening the community, or its potentially devastating consequences. This group were not in tune with what was happening and did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation. They did not understand how a casual word or a slip of the tongue could lead to unimaginable and unavoidable repercussions for individuals and the whole society. Perhaps because they did not feel complete loyalty to the Muslim community and were, therefore, not concerned about the effects on it of the spread of malicious rumours at times of both war and peace.

The danger can be devastating in both cases. The dissemination of news of peace in a community ready and preparing for war will spread a degree of relaxation, despite orders to be on the alert, because vigilance due to a threat is stronger than that due to obeying orders. Such moderation of watchfulness can be fatal. Similarly, spreading fear of war in a peaceful self-assured community can disrupt and unsettle it, forcing it to take measures that might be unnecessary and could also be fatal.

These are the features of a community that has not fully completed its organisation, or has not demonstrated full loyalty to its leadership, or both. Indeed both qualities were evident in the Muslim community at the time, consisting as it did of groups of various levels of conviction, understanding, and allegiance. It is this disharmony that the Qur'ān deals with here.

The Qur'ān identifies for the Muslim community the correct path to follow: *"If they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it."* (Verse 83) Had those Muslims referred the disruptive rumours to the Messenger, when he was still among them, or to those in authority, the competent and qualified among them would have deduced the facts and determined whether its circulation would benefit the Muslim community or be detrimental to its interests.

Decent and disciplined Muslim soldiers, working under a faithful and trusted leadership, are obliged to report any news or intelligence to their competent superiors rather than pass them around among colleagues or other unconcerned parties. A true Muslim leadership is one that is capable of arriving at the truth in all

matters, and of assessing the benefit of making certain information public, even if it is verified, or withholding it.

Thus the Qur'ān was teaching the Muslims. It was instilling them with faith in, and loyalty to, their trusted Muslim leadership. It encapsulates the essence of military discipline in one brief statement. The beginning of the verse depicts an unfavourable image of the soldier who spreads rumours and hearsay without any attempt at verification or reference to the leadership. The verse then gives the correct advice to follow in such a situation, before directing people's hearts to God, reminding them of His grace, urging them to show appreciation of Him, and warning them against following Satan who is awaiting the first opportunity to divert their hearts away from God. *"Were it not for God's bounty to you, and His grace, all but a few of you would certainly lb have followed Satan."* (Verse 83)

A single verse carries such a tremendous charge, covering all aspects of the question, and touching the deepest recesses of the human conscience. At the same time, it continues teaching and directing. This is proof that the Qur'ān originates with God; otherwise people would find enormous contradictions in it.

The Limits of Responsibility

At this point, having relentlessly exposed the faults existing within the Muslim community that are liable to affect its ability to fight and conduct its affairs, the *sūrah* reaches a crescendo in urging the Muslims to fight. While addressing God's Messenger with the order to fight, there is a personal recommendation not to be dissuaded by any dithering, hesitation, disruption or obstacles on the way, even if he had to fight alone, as he would only be accountable for his own actions and obligations. At the same time, it urges the Muslims to fight, giving them reassurance and a prospect of victory as God, who is stronger and swifter in punishment, will take charge of the battle. *"Fight, then, in God's cause, since you are responsible only for your own self and encourage the believers. God may well curb the might of the unbelievers; for God is the strongest in might, and in the ability to deter"* (Verse 84)

This verse, together with the preceding ones, reveal many characteristics of the Muslim community at the time of revelation, as well as numerous features of human beings at all times.

I. It exposes the inconsistency within the Muslim community and the deep effect on it of dithering, disruption and demoralisation; so much so that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is urged to take up arms and fight alone if necessary, fulfilling his personal obligations and continuing to motivate the believers to join him in the *jihād* whether they responded or not. Although

it was unlikely that they would all refuse to join, putting it in this way indicates how critical it is to emphasise these instructions and to incite the Muslims to respond. Beyond that, the statement also asserts the fundamental Islamic truth that every soul is accountable only for its own deeds.

II. It highlights the fears and hardships associated with fighting the non-Muslims at that time. Indeed, the utmost prospect of hope given to the Muslims is God's guarantee to deter the enemy and keep them at bay, the Muslim forces being a mere manifestation of His power. The passage clearly suggests that the non-Muslims were a formidable force and that fear was prevalent among the Muslims. This would be a reference to the intervening period between the Battles of Uĥud and the Moat, being the most critical period for the Muslims of Madinah. At that time the Muslim community had to contend with the hypocrites, the intrigues of the Jews and the zeal of the idolaters to fight them. Furthermore, the Muslims had yet to perfect their understanding of the basic principles and concepts of Islam.

III. It also brings to light man's urgent need for strong and close links with God Almighty, his need for His reassurance and support, and confidence in His power and authority. At times of great danger other powers are of no avail. These are facts the Divine approach deploys because, being man's creator, God knows best how to educate, mobilise and encourage human nature, and He knows well how human beings respond.

Different Deeds with Different Results

In the context of God's Messenger's exhortation to the believers to fight, towards the end of the passage, and the reference to those who discourage and dampen the spirit to fight, at its beginning, the *sūrah* states a general rule regarding intercession. The statement implies instruction, advice and co-operation. *"Whoever rallies to a good cause shall have a share in its [benefit], and whoever rallies to an evil cause shall have a share in its [burden]. God watches over everything."* (Verse 85)

Whoever participates in mobilising and encouraging and supporting others to fight for the cause of God will receive his due share of the reward for the fighting and its consequences. But those who promote demoralisation and discouragement will bear responsibility for the outcome of their exhortations. The Arabic term *kill* chosen in this context suggests liability for the consequences as well as the actions themselves.

This is a universal principle, which applies to intercession for good or for evil. The

Qur'ān often establishes a general principle through the discussion of a particular issue or event, linking the two together and referring the whole question to God Almighty. He is the source of everything and the source of all power, as the Arabic word used in commenting on the verse indicates: *"God watches over everything."* (Verse 85)

The *sūrah* then gives instructions that a greeting should be answered with a similar or better one. Public courtesy, when practised with politeness and civility, is a means for a smooth and harmonious social life. This closely relates, in social behaviour, to the principle of intercession referred to earlier: *"When a greeting is offered you, answer it with an even better greeting, or [at least] with its like. God keeps count of all things."* (Verse 86)

Islam introduced a special form of greeting which distinguishes Muslim societies and gives a distinct flavour to its daily routine behaviour. It makes Muslims stand out among all other human societies.

Islam has chosen the following forms of greeting: *"assalāmu `alaikum"* (peace be on you) or *"assalāmu `alaikum wa rahmatullāh"* (peace and God's mercy be on you) or *"assalāmu `alaikum wa rahmatullāh wa barakātuh"* (peace and God's mercy and blessings be on you). The more gracious reply would be to repeat the same phrase with the addition of the supplementary words to the first and second forms, the third one being a complete greeting, as follows: *"wa `alaikum assalāmu wa rahmatullāh"* (and peace and God's mercy be on you too) or *"wa `alaikum assalāmu wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh"* (and peace and God's mercy and blessings be on you too). According to the reported practice of the Prophet, the third form is answered by repeating the same phrase in full.

Let us look more closely at the subtle touches implicit in this verse. There is, firstly, the distinct identity which Islam emphatically seeks to confer on Muslim society to preserve its unique features and traditions, just as it has its own individual laws and systems. These aspects were discussed in detail when dealing with the change of the *qiblah,* or direction of prayer. (See Volume I, pp. 112 to 121)

And, secondly, there is the unremitting endeavour to strengthen the ties of amity and friendship among Muslims. The greeting of peace and the better response are one of the best means to achieve that close and solid relationship. God's Messenger was once asked: "What is the best thing one can do?" His reply was: "Give out food, greet with peace those you know and those you do not know." (Related by al-Bukhārī.) This manner of greeting is highly recommended in Muslim societies, and the present verse makes the reply, as outlined above, a religious obligation. The value of such social tradition becomes clear from its real effect in cleansing people's hearts and bringing people closer together and reinforcing the ties among them. This

is clear to all who study closely the effects of this tradition and its amazing consequences in society.

Thirdly, the verse introduces a touch of tranquillity and serenity to a discussion of fighting. It may be intended to point out Islam's fundamental foundation: peace. Islam is the religion of peace. It recommends fighting only in order to establish peace on earth. It advocates peace in its widest and most comprehensive sense; peace emanating from the compliance of human nature with the Divine order of God Almighty.

8
Organising External Relations

God, save whom there is no deity, will surely gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, which is sure to come, no doubt. Whose word could be truer than God's? (87)

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ لَيَجْمَعَنَّكُمْ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ ۗ وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ حَدِيثًا ﴿٨٧﴾

How could you be divided into two groups concerning the hypocrites, when God Himself has cast them off because of their guilt? Do you seek to guide those whom God has let go astray? For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way. (88)

۞ فَمَا لَكُمْ فِى ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ فِئَتَيْنِ وَٱللَّهُ أَرْكَسَهُم بِمَا كَسَبُوٓا۟ ۚ أَتُرِيدُونَ أَن تَهْدُوا۟ مَنْ أَضَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَمَن يُضْلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٨﴾

They would love to see you disbelieve as they themselves disbelieve, so that you may be all alike. Do not, therefore, take them for your allies, until they migrate for God's cause. If they turn against you, then seize them and kill them wherever you may find them. Do not take any of them for your ally or supporter. (89)

وَدُّوا۟ لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ كَمَا كَفَرُوا۟ فَتَكُونُونَ سَوَآءً ۖ فَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءَ حَتَّىٰ يُهَاجِرُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَخُذُوهُمْ وَٱقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ وَجَدتُّمُوهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿٨٩﴾

Except in the case of those of them who have ties with people to whom you yourselves are bound by a covenant, or those who come to you because their hearts shrink from the thought of fighting you or fighting their own people. Had God so willed, He would have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. Therefore, if they leave you alone, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God has given you no way against them.

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍۭ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُم مِّيثَٰقٌ أَوْ جَآءُوكُمْ حَصِرَتْ صُدُورُهُمْ أَن يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ أَوْ يُقَٰتِلُوا۟ قَوْمَهُمْ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَسَلَّطَهُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ فَلَقَٰتَلُوكُمْ ۚ فَإِنِ ٱعْتَزَلُوكُمْ فَلَمْ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ وَأَلْقَوْا۟ إِلَيْكُمُ ٱلسَّلَمَ فَمَا جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ سَبِيلًا

(90)

You will find others who would like to be safe from you as well as to be safe from their own people. Whenever they are called back to sedition they plunge headlong into it. If they do not leave you alone, and do not offer you peace and do not stay their hands, seize them and kill them wherever you come upon them. Over these We have given you a clear authority. (91)

﴿٩٠﴾
سَتَجِدُونَ ءَاخَرِينَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَأۡمَنُوكُمۡ
وَيَأۡمَنُواْ قَوۡمَهُمۡ كُلَّ مَا رُدُّوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ
أُرۡكِسُواْ فِيهَاۚ فَإِن لَّمۡ يَعۡتَزِلُوكُمۡ وَيُلۡقُوٓاْ
إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلسَّلَمَ وَيَكُفُّوٓاْ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ فَخُذُوهُمۡ
وَٱقۡتُلُوهُمۡ حَيۡثُ ثَقِفۡتُمُوهُمۡۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكُمۡ
جَعَلۡنَا لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٗا مُّبِينٗا ﴿٩١﴾

Never should a believer kill another believer, unless it be by mistake. He who kills a believer by mistake must free a believing soul from bondage and pay an indemnity to his family, unless they forego it by way of charity. If the victim belonged to a people who are at war with you, while he himself was a believer, then let his killer free a believing soul from bondage. If he (the victim) belonged to a people with whom you are bound by a covenant, then the penalty is an indemnity to be paid to his family and the freeing of a believing soul from bondage. He who cannot afford the wherewithal must fast for two consecutive months. This is the atonement ordained by God. God is All-Knowing, Wise. (92)

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤۡمِنٍ أَن يَقۡتُلَ مُؤۡمِنًا إِلَّا
خَطَـٔٗاۚ وَمَن قَتَلَ مُؤۡمِنًا خَطَـٔٗا فَتَحۡرِيرُ
رَقَبَةٖ مُّؤۡمِنَةٖ وَدِيَةٞ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ
أَن يَصَّدَّقُواْۚ فَإِن كَانَ مِن قَوۡمٍ عَدُوّٖ
لَّكُمۡ وَهُوَ مُؤۡمِنٞ فَتَحۡرِيرُ رَقَبَةٖ مُّؤۡمِنَةٖۖ
وَإِن كَانَ مِن قَوۡمِۭ بَيۡنَكُمۡ وَبَيۡنَهُم
مِّيثَٰقٞ فَدِيَةٞ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِۦ وَتَحۡرِيرُ
رَقَبَةٖ مُّؤۡمِنَةٖۖ فَمَن لَّمۡ يَجِدۡ فَصِيَامُ
شَهۡرَيۡنِ مُتَتَابِعَيۡنِ تَوۡبَةٗ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَكَانَ
ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ﴿٩٢﴾

He who deliberately kills a believer his punishment is hell, therein to abide permanently. God will be angry with him, and will reject him, and will prepare for

وَمَن يَقۡتُلۡ مُؤۡمِنٗا مُّتَعَمِّدٗا فَجَزَآؤُهُۥ
جَهَنَّمُ خَٰلِدٗا فِيهَا وَغَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِ

him a dreadful suffering (93)	وَلَعَنَهُۥ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُۥ عَذَابًا عَظِيمٗا ٩٣
Believers, when you go on an expedition to serve the cause of God, use your discernment and do not — out of a desire for the fleeting gains of this worldly life — say to one who offers you the greeting of peace: “You are not a believer”: for with God are abundant gains. Thus have you been in days gone by. But God has bestowed on you His grace. Therefore, use your discernment. Indeed God is always aware of what you do. (94)	يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا ضَرَبۡتُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَتَبَيَّنُواْ وَلَا تَقُولُواْ لِمَنۡ أَلۡقَىٰٓ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلسَّلَٰمَ لَسۡتَ مُؤۡمِنٗا تَبۡتَغُونَ عَرَضَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا فَعِندَ ٱللَّهِ مَغَانِمُ كَثِيرَةٞۚ كَذَٰلِكَ كُنتُم مِّن قَبۡلُ فَمَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٗا ٩٤

Overview

This new passage begins with an emphatic reiteration of the central principle of Islamic faith, declaring God’s oneness. It goes on to formulate on this basis a number of provisions to organise relations between the Muslim community and other groupings. The passage includes a denunciation of the division of Muslims into two groups with different views with regard to the treatment of hypocrites. It seems that this relates to a particular group of hypocrites who did not live in Madinah. These provisions, as well as the denunciation, are based on the same central principle of Islam which is stated most clearly whenever a piece of legislation or a practical directive is mentioned in the Qur’ān. It should be stated that these provisions constitute only a part of the rules which Islam was the first to enunciate in human history for the regulation of international relations. For the first time ever, these relations have a basis other than brute force.

Despite its international law and all the international organisations that have come into existence on the basis of such law, Europe began moving in this direction only in the seventeenth century (the eleventh century of the Islamic calendar). Generally speaking, this law remains theoretical, and international organisations are, on the whole, devices to conceal the ambitions of the great powers. In no way can they be described as aiming to ensure that justice is done. They have come into existence as a result of disputes between forces of equal strength.[14] Whenever this balance is heavily tilted one way or the other, international laws become of little value and

[14] The author wrote this during the late 1950s.

international organisations have no teeth.

Islam, the Divine code for human life, established the bases for international dealings in the seventh century (the first of the Islamic calendar), initiating them without pressure produced by any dispute. It formulated these bases for use by the Islamic society as it established its relations with other camps and forces. The Islamic aim being to raise the banner of justice high, even with hostile camps unable to commit themselves to the same principles. Indeed, Islam took the initiative to formulate these bases for the first time ever. We find them in different *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān, each of them explained within its proper context. Together, they constitute a complete code for international dealings. They provide an authoritative rule for every case which may take place between Islamic society and other camps, whatever attitude they may take towards Islam, be it one of open warfare, peaceful co-existence, alliance or neutrality. They also deal with other parties who may have some association with a camp that is hostile to, at peace with, in alliance with, or neutral to Islamic society. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss these principles and provisions in detail. They should be the subject of a full dissertation written by someone specialising in international law. Here, we will only look at what is contained in this passage of this *sūrah.* These speak of dealings with the following groups and cases:

1. The hypocrites who lived away from Madinah;
2. Those who were associated with a community that had a covenant with the Muslims;
3. Neutral people who had an aversion to warfare against the Muslims or against their own people, while they continued to follow their own religion;
4. Those who wished to play games with faith, pretending to be Muslims whenever they visited Madinah, but who declared their disbelief when they returned to Makkah;

Cases of accidental and deliberate killing among the Muslims in different situations and those belonging to different groups.

Clear and express provisions are given for all these cases. As we have already said, these provisions constitute a part of the principles governing international relations.

Guiding Principles

To start with, this passage begins with the basic principle central to the foundation of Islamic society. *"God, save whom there is no deity, will surely gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, which is sure to come, no doubt. Whose word could be truer than*

God's?" (Verse 87) In the cultivation of hearts and the education of people, as well as in establishing a Muslim community and giving it a distinctive shape and law, Islam begins with the basic principle of declaring the oneness of God and that He is the only deity in the universe. The same holds true whether the legislation to be enacted is an internal one for the Muslim community or whether it relates to international dealings. Hence, the passage which includes a host of provisions for external relations opens with the same central principle. It is from believing in the hereafter and the gathering by God of all His creatures, so that they may account for what they have done with the chances He has offered them in this life, that the Islamic system begins its work to cultivate hearts and educate people.

The aim is to provide Muslims with a keen sense of commitment to Islamic laws and directives and their operation in human life. Every little thing is part of the test set for every individual. Everyone will be held to account for all his deeds, large or small. This is the surest guarantee for the proper enforcement of all laws. It is a guarantee that is well rooted in the depths of the human soul. It gives it an ever sensitive conscience that remains alert when every external watch guard goes into deep slumber. This is God's Word and His promise: *"Whose word could be truer than God's?"* (Verse 87)

These words touch our hearts gently and are indicative of the method followed by the Qur'ān in educating the Muslim community. It also makes a clear statement of the central principle of the Islamic faith.

Dealing with Hypocrites

The next verse criticises the Muslim community's hesitation to adopt a firm attitude towards the hypocrites. The Muslim community was apparently in two minds, leading to some controversy with regard to its relationship with a group of hypocrites from outside Madinah. The criticism makes it clear that Islam only accepts a firm attitude in such matters. It allows for no hesitation in the Muslim community's approach to such a problem. Such hesitation means accepting the pretence they offer. This can only be done if it is based on a clearly defined plan of action.

> *How could you be divided into two groups concerning the hypocrites, when God Himself has cast them off because of their guilt? Do you seek to guide those whom God has let go astray? For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way.* (Verse 88)

We have two reports to indicate which group of hypocrites is meant in this Qur'ānic verse. The first, related by Imām Aĥmad, quotes Zayd ibn Thābit, a Companion of the Prophet, who says that the Prophet (peace be upon him) went out

to Uĥud [with an army]. Some of those who went with him, however, decided to go back. His Companions were divided on how to deal with these retractors. One group said that they must be killed. Another group objected, saying that they were believers. Then this Qur'ānic verse was revealed raising the question that the Muslims should adopt a unified attitude. The Prophet said: "This city is Ţaibah [another name for Madinah meaning that it is a good and virtuous city]. It throws away evil as a smelter throws away foreign elements in iron." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The other report quotes Ibn `Abbās as saying that this Qur'ānic verse speaks about certain people who indicated that they were Muslims while, at the same time, they supported the unbelievers. Once, when they went on a mission away from Makkah, they said that they were safe, should they encounter the Prophet's Companions. When the latter were told of their departure from Makkah, some of them suggested that they should "mount an expedition to meet those cowards and kill them, because they supported your enemies". Another group of believers said: "How can you kill people who have made the same declaration of faith which you have made? Is it because they have not migrated to Madinah that their killing and the confiscation of their property can be sanctioned?" Both groups maintained their attitudes, and the Prophet expressed no disapproval of either. Hence, why this Qur'ānic verse was revealed.

Although the first report appears to be more authentic from the point of view of its chain of transmitters and its inclusion in the most authentic collections of *aĥādīth,* the events mentioned in the second report appear to be more correct, considering historical events. We know for certain that no directive to fight against the hypocrites in Madinah was given to the Muslims. The Prophet never fought against them and never ordered their killing. Instead, there was a totally different plan for dealing with them, one which tolerated them until they were naturally cast away. Their support was weakened with the expulsion of the Jews, who used to encourage them. The Jews were forced out of Madinah before they were eventually evacuated from the whole of Arabia.

It may be said that the directive to take them prisoner and to kill them is made conditional on their migration to Madinah which is provided for in the following verse. It is, then, a warning issued to them to desist from their practices. They might have heeded this warning and the Prophet, therefore, would have had no reason to carry out this order. The condition, however, that this threat applies until "they have migrated", makes it absolutely clear that they were not of the people of Madinah. Their migration to Madinah was, in fact, required, because this whole episode took place before the conquest of Makkah. During that period migration meant to move out of the land of unfaith into the land of faith, i.e. Madinah, to join the Muslim

community and implement Islamic law. Otherwise, the identity of those who did not migrate while claiming to be Muslims was questionable. Later in the *sūrah* we have a strong denunciation of the attitude of those few Muslims who remained in Makkah despite their ability to migrate to Madinah, even though they were citizens of Makkah. All this serves to support the second report, describing those hypocrites as a group of the people of Makkah or its surrounding area who claimed to be Muslims while at the same time supporting the Muslims' enemies.

This strong denunciation of the believers' hesitant attitude towards those people is expressed in a rhetorical question: *"How could you be divided into two groups concerning the hypocrites, when God Himself has cast them off because of their guilt? Do you seek to guide those whom God has let go astray?"* (Verse 88) This question emphasises that it is dangerous for the Muslim community to hesitate when faced with hypocrisy, because it points to a lack of clarity with respect to the true nature of this religion. One group of believers could not imagine how the hypocrites could be killed when they had made verbal statements claiming to be Muslims. Yet those very people were aware that they did not belong to the Muslim community. This is clear in their statement: "We need fear nothing from Muĥammad's companions." This is also made clear by the other group of believers who stated that those hypocrites "support your enemies". The fact is that regardless of any verbal claim to belong to Islam, their practical support of the Muslims' enemies proves their hypocrisy beyond any doubt. Hence, there is no room for tolerance or overlooking such an attitude. Tolerance here is a weakness threatening the Muslim community. Hence, it is strongly denounced in the Qur'ān.

The same is not the case with the hypocrites of Madinah. The believers there were clear about their hypocrisy. There was, however, a well-known plan to tolerate them and accept their claims for the time being. The difference in the two cases is that in the one referred to in this verse, some Muslims advocated tolerance towards people living away from Madinah simply because they claimed verbally to be Muslims while at the same time practically supported the enemies of Islam. Hence, God's view of those people is stated clearly: *"When God Himself has cast them off because of their guilt."* (Verse 88) When God adopts a certain attitude there is no way a Muslim can adopt a different one. God has cast them off because of their wickedness and bad intentions.

This is followed by another reproach: *"Do you seek to guide those whom God has let go astray?"* (Verse 88) This probably suggests that the group of Muslims who advocated tolerance might have suggested that if the Muslims were to give those people a chance they might eventually overcome their reluctance in accepting Islam. God tells the believers that since these people merited His punishment, theirs was a hopeless case.

God allows to go astray only those who choose to do so. This means that when people actually do go astray, God allows them to go further away from the right path. He lets them continue their erring ways, moving further and further away from Divine guidance. It is they who have chosen error in preference to Divine guidance and they have done this consciously after being fully aware of the course of action acceptable to God.

Qualifications for Alliance with Believers

> *They would love to see you disbelieve as they themselves disbelieve, so that you may be all alike. Do not, therefore, take them for your allies, until they migrate for God's cause. If they turn against you, then seize them and kill them wherever you my find them. Do not take any of them for your ally or supporter.* (Verse 89)

This verse moves another step closer to exposing the attitude and intentions of the hypocrites. It is not only that they have chosen error in preference to Divine guidance and that their deeds and bad intentions have merited that God lets them go further astray, but they have deliberately tried to divert the believers off their right course into error: *"They would love to see you disbelieve as they themselves disbelieve, so that you my be all alike."*

Despite the fact that they repeat the same statements as the Muslims, and they have made the same declaration of believing in the oneness of God and in the messages of Muĥammad (peace be upon him), their practical support to the enemies of Islam belie their verbal statements. Nevertheless, they are not satisfied with that. One who consciously rejects the true faith does not feel happy when faith continues to make its presence felt on earth and attracts believers. He feels that he must work hard, utilising all his devices, to turn the Muslims back to disbelief so that they are in the same position as he. This is an initial definition of the hypocrite's real attitude. It leaves no room for a "wet" concept of faith. It makes absolutely clear that faith requires that action be consistent with verbal statements. Words have no significance if actions belie them.

The wording of the Qur'ānic verse sends a strong shudder into the believers' hearts. It tells them that those hypocrites *"would love to see you disbelieve as they themselves disbelieve, so that you may be all alike".* (Verse 89) They have only recently tasted the sweetness of faith after experiencing for long the bitter taste of unbelief. The great transformation which took place in their feelings, concepts and their society as a whole, as they moved from ignorance into Islam, was very real to them. It only required a light touch to arouse their hostility to anyone who wished them to revert to that low depth of ignorance from which Islam saved them and which

elevated them to its sublime heights. Making use of this state of mind, the Qur'ān issues its order to them at the moment when they are most alert to the danger posed by those hypocrites: *"Do not, therefore, take them for your allies, until they migrate for God's cause. If they turn against you, then seize them and kill them wherever you my find them. Do not take any of them for your ally or supporter."* (Verse 89)

The clear prohibition against taking allies from among them suggests that old family and tribal ties, and probably economic interests, had left their mark in the minds of the Muslims in Madinah. The Qur'ān deals with these traces and states clearly to the Muslim community the basis of the ties it establishes with others and the principles upon which its concepts are founded. The Muslims are being taught that a united community or a nation is founded neither on family, blood relationship or tribal ties, nor on the basis of living together in one city or one geographical area, nor on the basis of commercial or economic interests. It is only founded on an ideology and the social system such an ideology produces.

In practical terms, this means that there could be no alliance forged between Muslims living in the land of Islam and other people living in the land of war. At that time, the land of war was Makkah, the place of origin of those early Muslims who migrated to Madinah. What this Qur'ānic verse tells us is that there may never have been any alliance with those who claimed to be Muslims until they migrated to Madinah to join the Muslim society there; that is, until they took the practical step bringing them into the Muslim community. Only in this way, was their migration manifestly genuine, motivated by their faith, undertaken in service of God's cause, for the purpose of building the Muslim society which implements Islam. There could be no other purpose for their migration.

This is stated with a clarity and precision which leaves no room for any sort of ambiguity. If they comply with this requirement, moving into the land of Islam to live under the Islamic regime based on the Islamic faith and implementing Islamic law, leaving behind their families, interests and homes in the land of war, then they are part of the Muslim community and members of the Islamic society. Their refusal to migrate renders their verbal claims devoid of any substance: *"If they turn against you, then seize them and kill them wherever you may find them. Do not take any of them for your ally or supporter"* (Verse 89) It is this ruling which makes us more inclined to say that those hypocrites did not live in Madinah. A different policy was implemented with the hypocrites of Madinah themselves.

Islam is very tolerant with the followers of other faiths and ideologies. It does not force itself on anyone. Non-Muslims who live in a Muslim state under an Islamic regime may openly state their beliefs, which may be in conflict with the Islamic faith, provided that they do not try to win Muslims over to their faith and that they do not insult Islam. The Qur'ān denounces hurling abuse on Islam, as was done by the

followers of earlier religions, in very clear terms. It leaves no doubt that Islam does not allow those who live under its regime to criticise its principles in abusive terms or to distort its facts. Some people in our modern times would like us to believe that they are allowed this. This is totally untrue. It is sufficient that Islam does not force itself on people and that it protects the lives and properties of those who belong to other religions and who live in an Islamic society. Islam further affords to them the same benefits of Islamic life, without any discrimination between them and Muslims, and allows them to implement the rules of their faith in all matters which have no bearing on the general system as it applies to all citizens.

Islam extends this attitude of tolerance to those who openly adopt a different faith, but it does not extend it to those who make a claim to be Muslims but whose actions belie that claim. Its tolerance cannot accommodate those who declare that they believe in God's oneness, who testify that there is no deity except God, and who, at the same time, acknowledge to someone else any attribute which belongs solely to God, such as sovereignty and the authority to legislate. It describes as idolaters those of the people of earlier Scriptures who take their priests and rabbis as well as Jesus, son of Mary, as lords besides God. It is true that they did not worship those priests and rabbis, but they certainly followed their lead when they enacted for them legislation that makes certain things permissible and prohibits others.

Nor does Islam tolerate that some hypocrites should he described as believers, simply because they have made the verbal declaration that there is no deity other than God and that Muĥammad is His Messenger, but, at the same time, remained in the land of unfaith, giving their support to the Muslims' enemies. Tolerance in these circumstances is, in fact, complacency. Islam is tolerant but not complacent. It is a serious concept working within a serious system. Seriousness admits tolerance but has no room for complacency.

These directives given to the first Muslim community are, indeed, indicative of the nature of Islam and reveal a great deal to all Muslim generations.

Peace with Power

Having thus given a clear verdict against those who side with the unbelievers despite their claims to be Muslims, the *sūrah* states an exception in the case of those who seek refuge with people who have a covenant or a treaty with the Muslim community. The attitude determined for such a community now also applies to them: *"Except in the case of those of them who have ties with people to whom you yourselves are bound by a covenant."* (Verse 90)

We see here that Islam prefers peace whenever there is room for peace which does not impede its work of freely conveying its message to people and allowing them

free choice. Nothing and no one should be in a position to use force against the effort to convey Islam to people. The security of the Muslims should be guaranteed. They must not be exposed to any danger of sedition or to threats to the Islamic message which may cause its efforts to be hampered. For this reason, those who seek refuge and live with any group of people who are bound by a treaty or a covenant with the Muslims enjoy the same treatment as the people with whom they live. The same state of peace applies to them. This is clear evidence of the peaceful nature of Islam.

Exception from imprisonment and execution is also made in the case of those individuals or tribes or communities who take a neutral position, those who do not join the fighting which takes place between their people and the Muslims. Their hearts shrink from thoughts of either fighting with their people against the Muslims or fighting with the Muslims against their own kin. These people stand aside, unwilling to enter into any hostilities: *"Or those who come to you because their hearts shrink from the thought of fighting you or fighting their own people."* (Verse 90)

Again this ruling is evidence of the Islamic desire to avoid fighting others whenever they refrain from fighting the Muslims, choosing neutrality between them and their enemies. Those who did not fight on either side were present in Arabia and, indeed, within the Quraysh itself. Islam did not pressurise them to take sides for or against it. It was sufficient that they did not oppose Islam. At the same time, there was hope that they would eventually take the side of Islam, once the circumstances which caused their reluctance were removed. This was what actually happened in many cases.

God makes this line towards those neutrals beneficial to the Muslims when He reminds them of the other possibility that could have occurred. Those people could have sided with the hostile unbelievers and fought against the Muslims. The fact that they did not was far more preferable. *"Had God so willed, He would have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. Therefore, if they leave you alone, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God has given you no way against them."* (Verse 90)

We note here the fine touch delivered by the Qur'ān which restrains those Muslims who were full of enthusiasm and who may not have liked these peoples' neutrality. It is a reminder of God's grace. He has restrained these people from taking a hostile attitude that could have increased the Muslims' burden. The Muslims are instructed to accept whatever goodness is offered them and to avoid all evil that God has caused to stay away from them. This is, then, to be the attitude of the Muslim community, as long as it does not involve any relaxation of Islamic principles or complacency in matters of faith or humiliation to the Muslims through a sell out to their enemies. A cheap peace is unacceptable. The aim is not to avoid fighting at any price. The aim is to achieve a peace that does not encroach on any right of the

Muslims, whether these rights are due to people or to Islam as a message and philosophy.

It is only right and proper that all impediments should be removed from the way of conveying the message of Islam to mankind. The point is that everyone who receives this message should feel free to accept it without being exposed to any harm, and this should apply everywhere in the world. It is also needed so that Islam acquires sufficient strength to deter anyone from taking a hostile attitude or inflicting harm of any sort on those who believe in it. Beyond that, peace is preferable and *jihād* continues.

There is another group of people to whom Islam extends no tolerance, because it is an evil group of hypocrites with whom Islam has no covenant or treaty. Hence, it is free to take the appropriate stance against them: *"You will find others who would like to be safe from you as well as to be safe from their own people. Whenever they are called back to sedition they plunge headlong into it. If they do not leave you alone, and do not offer you peace and do not stay their hands, seize them and kill them wherever you come upon them. Over these We have given you a clear authority."* (Verse 91)

A report by Mujāhid suggests that this statement concerned a certain group of people from Makkah who came to the Prophet to declare that they were Muslims without actually being so. They then returned to Makkah where they reverted to idol worship. Their purpose was that they should feel safe and secure in both camps. Hence, Islam ruled that they be killed unless they stopped their erring ways. The verdict in this case is stated clearly: *"If they do not leave you alone, and do not offer you peace and do not stay their hands, seize them and kill them wherever you come upon them. Over these we have given you a clear authority"* (Verse 91)

We note here the clear balance in the Islamic attitude. It is serious and decisive but, at the same time, tolerant and forbearing. Each situation is faced with the most suitable of attitudes. When we consider both features, we realise that they provide every Muslim with a balanced attitude which becomes an essential feature of the Islamic system as a whole. When some people move towards extremism, adopting an uncompromising, violent attitude, then they do not represent Islam. On the other hand, Islam is not represented by those who take an apologetic attitude towards *jihād,* trying to defend Islam, which, in their view, stands indicted of violent extremism. They emphasise that Islam prefers peace in all situations and its permanent attitude is one of forbearance and forgiveness and that *jihād* is only allowed in the defence of Muslim land or the Muslim community. Thus, they narrow it down. *Jihād* is, indeed, a means of defending the Islamic message and its right to be conveyed freely to everyone, everywhere in the world. It is also the means to ensure that every individual, anywhere in the world is free to accept Islam. It guarantees the supremacy of a virtuous system, which extends security to all people, whether they

accept Islam or not. As we have already said, neither the narrow extremist view, nor the complacent apologetic view is correct. Again, these provisions of Islamic international law convey a clear message to mankind.

Indemnity for Accidental Killing

All the foregoing applies to relations between the Muslim community and other camps. The *sūrah* now moves on to speak of internal relations among Muslims, no matter how distant their countries are. It is clear that there can be no fighting or killing among Muslims except by way of punishment for certain crimes. The point is that there can be no situation superseding the relationship of faith that exists between Muslims. Hence, no Muslim may ever kill another Muslim, knowing that this strong tie of faith exists between them. Such killing may only happen by mistake. Since this is a possibility, it requires certain legal provisions. As for deliberate killing, it is a crime much too ghastly to be erased by any atonement. It is something that transgresses all boundaries of Islam.

> *Never should a believer kill another believer, unless it be by mistake. He who kills a believer by mistake must free a believing soul from bondage and pay an indemnity to his family, unless they forego it by way of charity. If the victim belonged to a people who are at war with you, while he himself was a believer, then let his killer free a believing soul from bondage. If he (the victim) belonged to a people with whom you are bound by a covenant, then the penalty is an indemnity to be paid to his family and the freeing of a believing soul ,from bondage. He who cannot afford the wherewithal must fast for two consecutive months. This is the atonement ordained by God. God is All-Knowing, Wise.* (Verse 92)

The *sūrah* provides legal provisions for four cases of killing, three of which may happen by mistake among Muslims in the same community or in different communities. The fourth is that of deliberate murder which, the Qur'ān insists, should never happen in the first place. Nothing should bring the relationship between two Muslims so low for a murder of this sort to take place. The relationship between two Muslims is too strong, deeply rooted, precious and dearly cherished for such a serious breach to be contemplated. Hence, the *sūrah* begins by legislating for accidental killing.

"Never should a believer kill another believer, unless it be by mistake." (Verse 92) This is the only possibility which is acceptable to the Islamic sense and which is possible in reality. For a Muslim to live side by side with another Muslim is a truly great blessing. It is inconceivable that a Muslim takes a deliberate step, after contemplation, to remove this great blessing from his life by committing such a horrendous crime. Muslims belong to a very dear race. The one who knows the value

of a Muslim is only another Muslim. Hence, killing him makes no sense. This is something well known to the people immediately concerned with it. They recognise it within themselves and in their feelings. It is God who has given it to them through their faith and their ties with God's Messenger. These ties are further elevated to bring them together, united by their bonds with God Himself who has established their remarkable unity.

When accidental killing takes place, there can be one of three cases for which legal provisions are made. The first is that when the victim belongs to a Muslim family living in the land of Islam. In this case, a slave who is a believer must be set free and an indemnity must be paid to the victim's family. Setting a slave free is a compensation made to the Muslim community by the revival of another Muslim soul. This is, indeed, how freeing a slave is viewed in Islam. As for the indemnity, it is paid in order to pacify those immediately affected by the killing. It compensates them for a part of their loss. At the same time, the Qur'ān hints that the victim's family may forego this indemnity, if they so desire, because such an attitude promotes feelings of forgiveness within the Muslim community: *"He who kills a believer by mistake must free a believing soul from bondage and pay an indemnity to his family, unless they forego it by way of charity."* (Verse 92)

The second case is that whereby the victim is, himself, a believer while his own people are at war with the Muslim community. In this case, a slave who is a believer must be freed to compensate for the believer who has been killed. No indemnity is payable to his people who are at war with Islam, because that would strengthen them in their fight against the Muslims. Here, there is no attempt to pacify the family of the victim or to win favour or to establish friendly relations with them. They are hostile to Islam and they fight against the Muslims.

The third case is one whereby the victim belongs to a people who have a treaty or a covenant with the Muslims. The Qur'ānic statement does not specify that the victim must be a believer in this case. This has led some commentators on the Qur'ān and other scholars to consider the statement a general one, applying to all people who have a covenant or a treaty with the Muslims, even if they are not believers. The fact that they have such a covenant makes them entitled to the same protection as Muslims.

It appears to us, however, that the whole verse deals with the killing of believers. The opening sentence in this Qur'ānic verse states: *"Never should a believer kill another believer, unless it be by mistake."* This is followed by detailing the various cases in which the victim is a believer. The fact that in the second case there is a clear and specific reference to the victim being a believer, *"If the victim belonged to a people who are at war with you, while he himself was a believer"*, has special significance. It is made in order to dispel any confusion about his identity because his people are at war with

the Muslims. The victim, himself, must be a believer, although his people are not. This understanding of the third case being applicable to victims of accidental death who are Muslims is supported by the fact that the penalty includes the freeing of a believing slave. Again this is compensation for the loss of one believer by freeing another from bondage. Otherwise, the freeing of any slave, believer or not, would have been adequate.

A number of reports speak of the Prophet paying indemnity to the families of victims of accidental death who belonged to tribes bound by covenants or treaties with the Muslims. These reports do not speak of the freeing of the same number of slave believers. This suggests that in this case the only penalty is the indemnity. This ruling is based on what the Prophet did, not on this verse. All three cases identified in this verse share a common factor: the victim is a believer, although his family may not be believers living in the Muslim community or belong to a hostile camp at war with the Muslims, or to a people at peace with Islam having a covenant with the believers. This is what appears to us to be a more accurate understanding of this verse.

Punishment for Deliberate Killing

All the foregoing applies to accidental killing. A deliberate murder of a believer is a crime too horrendous to be committed by anyone who has any trace of faith in his heart. It cannot be compensated for by any indemnity or by setting slaves free. The punishment in this case is exacted by God Himself: *"He who deliberately kills a believer, his punishment is hell, therein to abide permanently. God will be angry with him, and will reject him, and will prepare for him a dreadful suffering."* (Verse 93)

It is a crime of murder wherein the victim is not merely the human being who is killed without any justification whatsoever. It also kills the noble and dearly cherished tie established by God between one Muslim and another. It is a crime against the very idea of believing in God. For this reason, it is often associated with denying faith altogether. Some scholars of high standing including Ibn `Abbās, the Prophet's cousin, are of the opinion that no repentance of such a crime is acceptable. Other scholars who disagree, rely for their argument on the Qur'ānic verse which states: *"God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever he wills."* (Verse 116) These latter scholars say that a deliberate murderer of a Muslim may still hope for God's Forgiveness. They explain the statement that such a killer shall abide permanently in hell as signifying that hell will be his abode for a very long time.

The Prophet's Companions who graduated in the first Islamic school used to meet others who, prior to Islam, killed their fathers, sons or brothers and some of them

experienced bitter feelings as a result, but they never contemplated revenge killings. This is because they had all embraced Islam, and no thoughts of revenge were entertained by the relatives of the victims, even when their sorrow was most painful.

Indeed, they never thought of depriving them of any right given to them by Islam. To guard against accidental killing, and to ensure the purity of those whose hearts fight for God's cause so that they may be totally dedicated to the service of Islam, God instructs the Muslims not to fight with anyone or to kill them until they are sure of his identity. They must accept his statement if he claims to be a Muslim, since there can be no evidence to the contrary. *"Believers, when you go on an expedition to serve the cause of God, use your discernment and do not — out of a desire for the fleeting gains of this worldly life — say to one who offers you the greeting of peace: 'You are not a believer': for with God are abundant gains. Thus have you been in days gone by. But God has bestowed on you His grace. Therefore, use your discernment. Indeed God is always aware of what you do."* (Verse 94)

There are a number of reports that speak of the circumstances in which this verse was revealed. They may be summed up in such a way that suggests that a Muslim expedition once came across a man with his sheep. He greeted them with the Islamic greeting, *Assalāmu `alaikum,* to indicate that he was a Muslim. Some of them considered that this was merely words he spoke to save his life. Therefore, they killed him. This Qur'ānic verse was then revealed to indicate that such an action is forbidden. Believers must not entertain any thoughts which betray that they are after making any worldly gains or which show that they make hasty judgements. Both are unacceptable to Islam. When Muslims go out on a campaign of *jihād* for God's cause, then the gains that they may make must never come into their reckoning. Such gains are never a motive for *jihād.* Similarly, a hasty judgement may lead to the shedding of a Muslim's blood with whom the most cherished tie should exist. God reminds the believers of their recent days of *ignorance* which were characterised by hasty judgements and the coveting of worldly gains. He reminds them of His grace when He purified their hearts, elevated their ideals and placed their objectives on a sublime level.

They no longer stage war for any material gain as they used to do in the past. They are governed by His legislation, which provides a complete system for them to implement. Their judgements must not be based on rash decisions, characteristic of their days of *ignorance.*

The same statement may also be understood as implying a reference to the fact that they, themselves, used to conceal from their people the fact that they were Muslims. This is because they were too weak. They only revealed this when they felt secure in the company of other Muslims. The man who was thus killed might have concealed the truth of his being a Muslim from his own people. When he met the

Muslims, he offered them the greeting of peace characteristic of Muslims, to indicate that he, himself, was a Muslim: *"Thus have you been in days gone by. But God has bestowed on you His grace. Therefore, use your discernment. Indeed God is always aware of what you do."* (Verse 94)

We note how the Qur'ān touches the believers' most sensitive feelings in order to remind them of God's grace and to make them more conscious of their obligations. It is through this sensitivity and consciousness that Islam achieves full commitment by its followers to its legal system, after having explained its laws most clearly. It is this clarity and purity that characterises external relations between Islam and other communities, as explained in this passage.

9
Fighting for the Oppressed

Those of the believers who remain passive, other than the disabled, are not equal to those who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives. God has exalted those who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above the ones who remain passive. To each God has promised the ultimate good, yet God has preferred those who strive hard over those who remain passive with a mighty reward: (95)

لَّا يَسْتَوِى ٱلْقَـٰعِدُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ
أُو۟لِى ٱلضَّرَرِ وَٱلْمُجَـٰهِدُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُجَـٰهِدِينَ
بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ عَلَى ٱلْقَـٰعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً ۚ
وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ وَفَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ
ٱلْمُجَـٰهِدِينَ عَلَى ٱلْقَـٰعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا
﴿٩٥﴾

degrees of honour, forgiveness of sins and His grace. God is Much- Forgiving, Merciful. (96)

دَرَجَـٰتٍ مِّنْهُ وَمَغْفِرَةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ
غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٩٦﴾

To those whom the angels gather in death while they are still wronging themselves, the angels will say: "What were you doing?" They will answer: "We were oppressed on earth." (The angels) will say: "Was not God's earth so spacious that you might have migrated to settle elsewhere?" Such will have their abode in Hell, a certainly evil end. (97)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ ظَالِمِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا۟ فِيمَ كُنتُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ كُنَّا
مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ قَالُوٓا۟ أَلَمْ تَكُنْ
أَرْضُ ٱللَّهِ وَٰسِعَةً فَتُهَاجِرُوا۟ فِيهَا ۚ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ
مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَسَآءَتْ مَصِيرًا ﴿٩٧﴾

Excepted are the men, women, and children who, being truly helpless, can devise nothing and can find no way. (98)

إِلَّا ٱلْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ
وَٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلْوِلْدَٰنِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ حِيلَةً
وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٩٨﴾

فَأُوْلَـٰٓئِكَ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَعْفُوَ عَنْهُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَفُوًّا غَفُورًا ﴿٩٩﴾

These God may well pardon, then, for God is indeed most Lenient, Much-Forgiving. (99)

۞ وَمَن يُهَاجِرْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مُرَٰغَمًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً ۚ وَمَن يَخْرُجْ مِنۢ بَيْتِهِۦ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ ٱلْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُۥ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find on earth many places for refuge and great abundance. He who leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto God and His Messenger, and is then overtaken by death, his reward is reserved for him with God. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (100)

وَإِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَقْصُرُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ إِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَن يَفْتِنَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ كَانُوا۟ لَكُمْ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا ﴿١٠١﴾

When you go forth on earth, you will incur no sin by shortening your prayers, if you have reason to fear that the unbelievers may cause you affliction. Truly, the unbelievers are your sworn enemies. (101)

وَإِذَا كُنتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَلْتَقُمْ طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُم مَّعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوٓا۟ أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَإِذَا سَجَدُوا۟ فَلْيَكُونُوا۟ مِن وَرَآئِكُمْ وَلْتَأْتِ طَآئِفَةٌ أُخْرَىٰ لَمْ يُصَلُّوا۟ فَلْيُصَلُّوا۟ مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا۟ حِذْرَهُمْ وَأَسْلِحَتَهُمْ ۗ وَدَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَوْ تَغْفُلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُم مَّيْلَةً وَٰحِدَةً ۚ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِن كَانَ بِكُمْ أَذًى مِّن مَّطَرٍ أَوْ كُنتُم مَّرْضَىٰٓ أَن تَضَعُوٓا۟ أَسْلِحَتَكُمْ ۖ وَخُذُوا۟ حِذْرَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْكَـٰفِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

When you are with the believers and about to lead them in prayer, let one group of them stand up with you, holding on to their weapons. Then, after they have prostrated themselves, let them be behind you, while the other group, who have not yet prayed, shall come forward and pray with you, and let these be on their guard, holding on to their weapons. The unbelievers would love to see you oblivious of your weapons and your equipment, so that they might swoop on you with one assault. But it is no offence for you to lay down your arms [while you pray] if you are bothered by heavy rain, or suffering from illness; but you must always be on your guard. God has prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers.

(102)

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ قِيَـٰمًا
وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَا ٱطْمَأْنَنتُمْ
فَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى
ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَـٰبًا مَّوْقُوتًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

And when you have performed your prayers, remember God standing, sitting, and lying down. When you are again secure, observe your prayers [fully]. Indeed, prayer is a time- related duty, binding on all believers. (103)

وَلَا تَهِنُوا۟ فِى ٱبْتِغَآءِ ٱلْقَوْمِ ۖ إِن تَكُونُوا۟
تَأْلَمُونَ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَأْلَمُونَ كَمَا
تَأْلَمُونَ ۖ وَتَرْجُونَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا
يَرْجُونَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

Do not be faint of heart when you seek out the [enemy] host. If you happen to suffer pain, they also suffer pain as you do; while you hope to receive from God what they can never hope for. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (104)

Overview

This passage is closely connected to the two passages that precede it. Indeed, it complements them. Had it not been for our concern to highlight international relations as outlined by Islam, we would have joined all three passages together. The subject matter here is migration to the land of Islam. Those who had accepted Islam, but who still remained in their homes in the land of war are strongly urged to join the Muslim community in Madinah which was striving hard for God's cause, sacrificing their lives and possessions. They are clearly required here to abandon their relatively more comfortable positions in Makkah, where they lived with their families and clans. These were perhaps the ones who are described in these verses as *"remaining passive"*. For, there was no Muslim "remaining passive" in Madinah, other than the hypocrites whose situation was discussed in a totally different tone in the preceding passage.

This first point is followed by a stern warning to those who stay in the land of unfaith. This they do despite their ability to join the Muslim community where they can add to the strength of the believers. Nonetheless, they remain safe in their homes until their souls are gathered by the angels, still in a condition of *"wronging themselves"*. Their abode is hell which is described as an evil destination.

Following this, we have a guarantee from God to anyone who migrates to serve

His cause. The guarantee is effected from the moment he leaves home, having no purpose other than joining the camp of believers. The guarantee deals with all the fears entertained by anyone who undertakes such a risky and costly adventure. It is clear that the *sūrah* follows the same thread of *jihād,* or striving for God's cause and migration by believers to join the ranks of those who are engaged in such striving. It also legislates for relations between the Muslim community and others who remain outside its land, including Muslims who have chosen not to migrate.

The passage also discusses prayer in a state of fear whether in the battlefield or on the way to the land of the believers. To speak about prayer at these critical times shows how seriously Islam views prayers. This creates a psychological state which enables believers to face the real dangers posed by their enemies who are always on the alert, trying to seize upon any lapse of concentration on the part of the Muslims. The passage ends with a strong, highly effective remark, encouraging the believers to continue to strive for God's cause despite what they may face in the way of hardship. This is coupled with a clear description of the believers' mentality and that of their enemies: *"Do not be faint of heart when you seek out the [enemy] host. If you happen to suffer pain, they also suffer pain as you do; while you hope to receive from God what they can never hope for. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 104)

It is a description showing two different ways and approaches that have no meeting point. To pursue the path of faith means to strive tirelessly, and to think little of any difficulty and hardship. Believers should not forget that those in the other camp also suffer pain and encounter difficulties, but what believers hope to receive from God is incomparable to what the others receive.

In the various points it discusses and the way it deals with different aspects, this passage gives us a picture of what the Muslim community experienced as it faced the practical problems associated with its formation as a separate and independent community. It describes for us the elements of human weakness, the remaining influences of the dark, recent past and other aspects of human nature and their bearing on the new Muslim community as it undertook to fulfil its duties. It also shows how such pain and hardship are coupled with aspirations and eagerness to fulfil those duties. It is the wise, Divine approach that encourages such aspirations and urges such eagerness, working always to refine human nature and prepare it for its great task.

All this comes out clearly in the description of the situation, the encouragement given to the believers and in dealing with natural fears and real pain suffered by the Muslim community. But it is also seen very clearly in the emphasis it lays on ensuring appropriate preparation and equipment for battle, particularly by prayer, as well as hard work and full alertness. A suitable mentality for the forthcoming struggle is further consolidated by the trust the migrants place in God, His reward

for those who strive hard, and support for those who leave home to fight for His cause. This is strengthened even further by knowledge of the humiliating suffering He has prepared for the unbelievers.

This passage also provides a very good example of how the Qur'ān deals with human nature in both situations of strength and weakness, and with the human community in both its stages of initial formation and maturity. We see how it pulls all the strings together at the same time and in the same verse. Of particular significance in this respect is how the Qur'ān fills the Muslim community with feelings of superiority over its enemies. But at the same time, it encourages the Muslim community to be always on the alert, ready to face any threats and dangers. Furthermore, it alerts it to its shortcomings and weaknesses, strongly urging it to eliminate all these.

It is a remarkable method, complete and perfectly suited to human nature. It is also extraordinary in the number of strings it pulls together in order to get a holistic response and a fine overall tune. Indeed, it was the superiority of the Qur'ānic method of educating the Muslim community and the superior social organisation it establishes that has ensured the Muslim community's remarkable distinction over other communities. This clear superiority gave the emerging Muslim community, despite its adverse circumstances and occasional weaknesses, the ability to overwhelm other communities. It was not merely a military victory. It was the triumph of a young, vigorous civilisation over one that had grown old. It was the ultimate victory of a new method and way of life. It heralded the beginning of a new era, a new human being, and a new human community.

What Elevates People in Rank

> *Those of the believers who remain passive, other than the disabled, are not equal to those who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives. God has exalted those who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above the ones who remain passive. To each God has promised the ultimate good, yet God has preferred those who strive hard over those who remain passive with a mighty reward: degrees of honour, forgiveness of sins and His grace. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.* (Verses 95-6)

This statement addresses a special case within the Muslim community wherein some elements had demonstrated their reluctance to meet the obligations required in striving for God's cause, requiring sacrifice of both possessions and lives. This may be a reference to those who preferred to stay at home and not migrate to Madinah, so that they could hold on to their property and possessions. The unbelievers did not allow anyone who migrated to Madinah to take any part of their wealth. They had to

abandon all their possessions. Others may have preferred to stay at home to spare themselves the hardship and risks of migration. Rarely did the unbelievers allow the Muslims to migrate. In the majority of cases, they imprisoned and ill-treated them, or, more accurately, they intensified their ill-treatment when they suspected that they intended to leave. We are more inclined to this view with regard to what is meant by the reference to those believers who *"remain passive"*. It may also refer to some people within the Muslim community who did not readily show their willingness to sacrifice their possessions and their lives for God's cause. This obviously excludes the hypocrites who were mentioned in the preceding passage and who tried to dissuade the Muslims from striving for God's cause. The description could mean both groups of people in both lands who were not ready to make the necessary sacrifices.

Although this verse addresses a special case, it is phrased in the form of a general principle that is not restricted to a particular time or a particular community. What we have in this verse, then, is a principle, describing how God views the believers at any time or place. A distinction is clearly made between true believers and those who remain passive, reluctant to sacrifice themselves or their possessions for God's cause despite having no disability to prevent them from joining in the *jihād* and making the necessary sacrifices. These are certainly unlike those who come forward and strive hard with all they have.

The principle is stated in the most general of terms: *"Those of the believers who remain passive, other than the disabled, are not equal to those who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives."* (Verse 95) This is followed by a clarification which leaves no room whatsoever for ambiguity: *"God has exalted those who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above the ones who remain passive."* (Verse 95)

The Prophet gives us a feeling of what this distinction in rank actually means. Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim relate, on the authority of Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī, that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: "There are one hundred ranks in heaven which God has prepared for those who strive hard for His cause. The distance between each two ranks is equal to the distance between the earth and the heavens." `Abdullāh ibn Mas`ūd, a Companion of the Prophet, quotes him as saying: "He who throws an arrow [to serve God's cause] will be recompensed for it with the advancement of one rank." One man asked him what he meant by a rank? He answered: "It is certainly unlike a step in your mother's home. Between each two ranks is a hundred years."

Now that we, in our modern times, know something of the distances which separate planets in the universe, and understand that it takes hundreds of light years for the rays of light to travel from one star to one planet, we are perhaps better able to imagine the distances to which the Prophet alludes. The Prophet's Companions who heard him making these statements believed him without question. We

obviously believe in the truthfulness of his words in addition to our being in a better position now to understand what these distances mean.

Having stated that there is a distinction among the believers between those who remain passive and those who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives, this Qur'ānic verse states that God has promised a great reward for both: *"To each God has promised the ultimate good."* (Verse 95) The very fact of believing in God has its value which must not be underestimated. Nevertheless, the believers have their ranks according to their willingness to fulfil the duties of faith, especially in respect of sacrifice of self and property. It is this last statement which tells us that those who remain passive are not the hypocrites. They are a group of good believers who have taken their positions alongside the other Muslims but have been complacent with regard to this particular duty. They are urged here to overcome their complacency, since they are genuine believers.

This is followed by a restatement of the original principle which is here reaffirmed and expanded by way of encouragement to seek the great reward which is promised to those who strive hard: *"Yet God has preferred those who strive hard over those who remain passive with a mighty reward: degrees of honour, forgiveness of sins and His grace. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verses 95-6)

The Philosophy of Jihād

Those who strive hard for God's cause are certain, by God's promise, to achieve real glory, while those who remain passive cannot aspire to anything similar. Moreover, the prospect of great reward, the forgiveness of sins by God and abundant mercy is raised high. All this points to two important facts.

The first is that these verses were dealing with real cases within the Muslim community. This should make us better aware of human nature. An individual or a community may achieve a high standard of faith, but remain, nevertheless in need of constant care to deal with any weakness or complacency which may hamper the fulfilment of duties, especially those of striving hard to serve God's cause with complete dedication, sacrificing life and wealth. That such feelings of weakness, complacency or failure to come forward with dedicated service should overtake a person or a community need not cause us to lose hope of their positive response later on or make us look down on them. As long as sincerity and serious willingness to remain with the Muslim community and to deal positively with God remain, we must not give up on them. Yet we cannot just accept that such weakness, complacency and failure are part of human nature without doing anything about it. We still have to motivate that nature to seek the sublime and to reach for the highest standard. Such motivation can take all possible ways and forms as we see in the

Qur'ānic method that, itself, reflects Divine wisdom.

The other fact is the value which Islam assigns to striving hard to serve God's cause and what that may involve of sacrificing wealth and life. God gives it such a high value because He is fully aware of what such a dedicated service means in practical terms and He knows human nature and the nature of the forces which are always hostile to Islam.

Jihād, or striving hard in God's cause, was not something accidental to the particular period which witnessed the advent of Islam. It is a permanent need, inherent in the nature of the Islamic faith. Some people, influenced by the existing situation when great empires ruled the world, have mistakenly expressed the view that the early Muslims thought that it was essential for them to be truly powerful, in a military sense. Such views betray, to say the least, a total failure to understand the true nature of Islam.

Had *jihād* been an accidental development, necessitated by temporary circumstances, it would not have merited such a lengthy exposition in a large number of *sūrahs* and passages in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* and it would not have been treated in such an emphatic style. The Prophet would not have made such a comprehensive statement, addressed to every Muslim in every period of history, as long as human life on earth continues. "He who does not take part or at least contemplates taking part in a campaign of *jihād* until the end of his life meets his death holding to a branch of hypocrisy."

It is true that the Prophet turned back certain individuals who wanted to join *jihād* campaigns because of their particular family situation. It is authentically reported, for example, that a man sought the Prophet's permission to go on *jihād.* The Prophet asked him whether his parents were alive. When the man answered in the affirmative, the Prophet said to him: "Go and strive hard in their service." This, however, was an individual case that does not contradict the general rule. For one man to be withdrawn from an army does not weaken that army. The Prophet was always aware of the circumstances of his Companions. He might have known enough of the particular family circumstances of that man to warrant giving him this directive.

The assumption must never be made that jihād was only incidental to a particular situation in a particular place, and that that situation no longer exists. It is not that Islam loves to draw its sword and chop off people's heads with it. The hard facts of life compel Islam to have its sword drawn and to be always ready and careful. God knows that those who hold the reigns of power are hostile to Islam and that they will always try to resist it, because it points to a way and a method different from theirs. This does not apply to a particular period of past history. It applies to the situation

today and tomorrow, in all places and throughout all generations.

God also knows that evil is arrogant and can never be fair. It cannot allow the seeds of goodness to grow. It does not matter which peaceful tactics the advocates of goodness adopt, the very fact that goodness begins to grow represents a threat to evil. The very existence of the truth endangers falsehood. Evil will always tend to be aggressive and to defend its existence by attempting to smother the truth, never hesitating to use brute force. This is part of nature, not something incidental to a particular situation.

Hence, *jihād,* in every form, is essential. It must start in people's hearts and emerge into the real world. This points the way to the inevitable confrontation between armed evil and armed goodness. The forces of falsehood, in their great numbers and heavy armament, must be countered with the properly equipped forces of goodness. Otherwise it would be a suicidal situation or one that is lacking seriousness. Either attitude is unbecoming of believers. Proper preparation for a serious confrontation requires sacrificing possessions and lives, as God required the believers to do, purchasing all these from them in return for admitting them into heaven. He either gives them victory or martyrdom. It is all within His prerogative and He makes His decision on the basis of His wisdom. As for them, He has promised them one of the two best achievements. All people die when the time comes, but only those who fight for God's cause can be martyrs.

There are a number of basic principles upon which the foundation of the Islamic faith, its practical method and line of action are built. These have nothing to do with changing circumstances. They must not be overlooked or underestimated by believers in any situation. One of these principles is *jihād,* or striving hard for God's cause and under His banner. It is the one that earns martyrdom for the one who falls in combat. They are the only martyrs honoured by God.

Misguided or Oppressed?

The *sūrah* then examines the case of those who remain passive, staying in the land of unfaith instead of migrating to the land of Islam. Their motives for so staying behind are to look after their property and interests, or an inherent weakness which makes them unwilling to undertake the arduous task of migration. Had they been willing to sacrifice, they would have been able to migrate, but they stay put until the angels are instructed to gather them in death. They are portrayed here in a derogatory way, which should have been enough to motivate any one of them to flee from the land of evil to join the ranks of the believers.

To those whom the angels gather in death while they are still wronging themselves,

> *the angels will say: "What were you doing?" They will answer: "We were oppressed on earth." (The angels) will say: "Was not God's earth so spacious that you might have migrated to settle elsewhere?" Such will have their abode in Hell, a certainly evil end. Excepted are the men, women, and children who, being truly helpless, can devise nothing and can find no way. These God may well pardon, then, for God is indeed most Lenient, Much-Forgiving.* (Verses 97-99)

These verses are speaking of a real situation that existed in Makkah and elsewhere in the Arabian peninsula after the Prophet's migration and the establishment of the Islamic state. There were still some Muslims who stayed behind, unwilling to sacrifice their property and interests because the unbelievers did not allow those who migrated to take any possessions with them. Some of them might have feared the consequences of migration, because the unbelievers were ever watchful, trying to turn hack any Muslim who sought to leave for Madinah. Some, however, were too weak to migrate. Among them were the elderly, women, and children who could not find a way of escape.

Unable to seize the Prophet and his Companions when they migrated to Madinah and unable to prevent the establishment of the Muslim state, the unbelievers turned the screw on those Muslims who stayed behind, especially when the new Muslim state began to intercept the Quraysh's trade caravans. When the Muslims were able to score their resounding victory at Badr, the unbelievers in Makkah escalated their torture of those Muslims who were left behind, trying to force them to return to idol worship. Some of them succumbed to the pressure, feeling compelled to at least pretend that they were no longer Muslims and taking part with the unbelievers in their idolatrous practices. This facade of having rejected Islam was permitted them when they had no state to which they could migrate. However, after the establishment of that state, such pretence was no longer acceptable and especially when the means to migrate were available. Migration enabled them to declare that they were Muslims and to live according to the principles of faith.

These verses were revealed to address that particular case. They describe the people unwilling to migrate for one of the above reasons as *"wronging themselves"*. They have indeed done themselves a great wrong by depriving themselves of the opportunity to live in the land of Islam where they could enjoy a clean, healthy, blessed life, free from all pressures. Instead, they chose to live in weakness and to suffer persecution. Moreover, these verses warn them that their abode will be Hell, and describe it as *"a certainly evil end"*. This suggests that this particular statement refers to those who actually turned back from Islam in Makkah.

In the inimitable fashion of the Qur'ān, this whole situation is portrayed very vividly: *"To those whom the angels gather in death while they are still wronging themselves, the angels will say: 'What were you doing?' They will answer: `We were oppressed on earth.'*

(The angels) will say: `Was not God's earth so spacious that you might have migrated to settle elsewhere?'" (Verse 97)

The Qur'ān is dealing here with human beings in whom it attempts to arouse the elements of goodness, courage, and dignity, and to eradicate the elements of weakness, miserliness and humility. It, therefore, gives us this portrait delineating a true situation. It makes use, however, of that true situation to treat human weaknesses. The scene of approaching death is one that sends a shiver into a man's heart. Portraying the angels in the way in which the Qur'ān does makes it more vivid, and heightens our fear. Those people have wronged themselves, and the angels have arrived to gather them in that condition. This, again, makes one's heart shudder. It is sufficient for anyone to imagine himself with the angels terminating his life while he is wronging himself. He has no other chance to redeem himself.

The angels, however, do not keep quiet as they cause these people to die. They review their past history and find a great deal wanting therein. Therefore, they ask them what they were preoccupied with during their days and nights. Their preoccupation has, after all, meant their utter loss. At the moment of death, they provide a humiliating reply, thinking this sufficient justification for their cowardice: *"We were oppressed on earth." We* were humiliated by the people in power and we were unable to do anything about our situation.

Despite all the self-degradation inherent in this reply, which leads us to despise the person who takes such an attitude at the point of death, after having refused to migrate throughout his lifetime, the angels confront these people with the reality of their situation. They reproach them for not having tried when the chance was there: *"Was not God's earth so spacious that you might have migrated to settle elsewhere?"* It was not helplessness that forced them to accept humility and oppression in preference to migrating to the land of Islam. There was something else, namely, their unwillingness to sacrifice their property and possessions and interests in the land of evil. Holding on to these, they remain in their homes when God's earth is so spacious as to make migration possible if only they are willing to make the necessary sacrifice. This highly effective scene concludes with a fearful end: *"Such will have their abode in Hell, a certainly evil end."* (Verse 97)

An exception is then made for those who did not have any real chance of leaving the land of evil where they were persecuted and deprived of the easy and happy life in the land of Islam. These include the elderly, women, and children who are truly helpless. To these, the prospect of God's forgiveness and mercy is raised because their reasons are valid: *"Excepted are the men, women, and children who, being truly helpless, can devise nothing and can find no way. These God may well pardon, then, for God is indeed most Lenient, Much-Forgiving."* (Verses 98-99)

This ruling remains valid until the end of time. It transcends the case of those Muslims who are subjected to pressure and persecution aimed at turning them away from their faith, and yet who stay where they are in order to look after their possessions and interests or to be with their relatives and friends or because of their unwillingness to undertake the hardships of migration. Once there is a place on earth, any place, where Islam rules and where one can feel secure declaring one's faith and fulfilling one's religious duties, then one must migrate in order to live under the banner of Islam and enjoy the sublime standard of life Islam affords.

What Value for Leaving Home

The *sūrah* continues its task of treating those aspects of human nature that continue to raise apprehensions of the difficulties and hardships of migration. It depicts those who prefer to suffer persecution in their homeland, which may end in their turning away from Islam, in a scene which evokes feelings of contempt and fear. The next verse tries to counter that reluctance by giving reassurance to anyone who sets out from his homeland only to serve God's cause, whether he arrives at his destination or dies on the way. God guarantees the reward to such a migrant from the moment he leaves home and promises him that he will find many places of refuge and abundance. "*Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find on earth many places for refuge and great abundance. He who leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto God and His Messenger, and is then overtaken by death, his reward is reserved for him with God. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.*" (Verse 100)

We see in this verse how the Qur'ān, in its realistic approach to human problems, addresses the normal apprehensions of someone embarking on migration in the sort of circumstances which prevailed at that time. The same or similar apprehensions may beset anyone who embarks on such a journey at any time. It addresses us with remarkable clarity and lucidity. Nothing that the migrant fears is concealed. No danger, including that of death, is dismissed out of hand. Reassurance is provided through other facts and through a guarantee from God Himself.

Migration must be "for God's cause". This is the only type of migration which earns a reward. It is not a journey for financial gain or for evading problems, or for indulging in carnal pleasures or for any other worldly concern. When the purpose of migration is definitely serving God's cause, the person who undertakes it will inevitably find many places of refuge and great abundance. He does not feel that his whole world has shrunk into a small, tight place. Nor is he helpless, unable to earn his living: "*Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find on earth many places for refuge and great abundance.*" (Verse 100)

It is part of human weakness to think that the chances of a comfortable life are

restricted to a particular land or work within certain circumstances, to the extent that abandonment of these means the end of life. It is such a false concept of life, earning one's living and escaping danger that leads people to tolerate humility and even yield to the pressure to turn away from their faith. All that inevitably leads to the evil end preserved for those who are gathered in death by the angels while they are still *"wronging themselves"*. God states here His promise to anyone who migrates for no reason other than serving His cause. He will find refuge and abundance and he will enjoy God's care and support wherever he goes.

Yet, the time appointed for the end of one's life may arrive during that very journey. As has already been explained, death has nothing to do with its apparent causes. It only comes at its appointed time, whether the person stays in his homeland or leaves. No one can bring forward or put back that appointed time. Nevertheless, human beings form their concepts, influenced, as they are, by apparent circumstances. This is taken into consideration by the Qur'ānic method of addressing human problems. The reward of migration is, therefore, guaranteed from the moment one leaves one's home having no aim other than serving God's cause: *"He who leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto God and His Messenger, and is then overtaken by death, his reward is reserved for him with God."* (Verse 100) This is a reference to the full reward which is preserved for migration, arrival in the land of Islam, and living there with the Muslim community. Anything guaranteed by God is certain to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, along with this guarantee, we have an increase in the form of a reference to God's forgiveness and mercy: *"God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."*

It is decidedly a profitable deal. The one who embarks on migration for God's cause is shown to receive his full reward from the moment he leaves. Death comes at its appointed time, whether one leaves home or not. Indeed, had the person concerned stayed at home he would have still died at that particular time, but he would have missed out on this highly profitable deed. Now, he has no reward, no forgiveness and no mercy. The angels will gather him in death while he is still wronging himself. The difference between the two situations is as great as the difference between the two ends.

The verses we have already looked at in this passage point to several important principles which we may sum up in the following words. The first is that Islam views the attitude of those who remain passive and unwilling to join the ranks of those who are engaged in *jihād* as highly repugnant. This applies to everyone except the ones who are exempted by God either because of their physical disability or a helplessness which makes them unable to devise any way of escape.

Secondly, the duty of *jihād* is central to the Islamic faith and to the Islamic system. Indeed, the Shī`ah include it as one of the pillars upon which the structure of Islam is founded. They support this view with Qur'ānic and *ĥadīth* statements as well as

practical considerations which give their argument a considerable measure of validity. Against this, we have the *ĥadīth* which states that the "structure of Islam is built on five pillars". However, the great emphasis placed on the duty of *jihād* and its central importance to Islamic life everywhere and at all times, makes the need for it an intrinsic one. It is not related to any circumstantial considerations.

Thirdly, we note that human beings are the same at all times. They may hesitate before any danger or scaling any great impediment. This applies even in the best of societies and the best of times. This should not, however, make us lose hope of people who may show such a reluctance. We should, indeed, encourage them and use both elements of warning and reassurance at the same time, in the same way as the Qur'ān does.

Finally, we note how the Qur'ān faced up to the problems of real life and gave directions to the Muslim community on how to engage in battle, on all fronts. Needless to say, the most important front is that of human nature. This should give us an insight into how to understand the Qur'ān and how to refer to it when we face problems in our efforts to call people to accept Islam and implement it.

Prayer Even on the Battlefield

> *When you go forth on earth, you will incur no sin by shortening your prayers, if you have reason to fear that the unbelievers may cause you affliction. Truly, the unbelievers are your sworn enemies. When you are with the believers and about to lead them in prayer, let one group of them stand up with you, holding on to their weapons. Then, after they have prostrated themselves, let them be behind you, while the other group, who have not yet prayed, shall come forward and pray with you, and let these be on their guard, holding on to their weapons. The unbelievers would love to see you oblivious of your weapons and your equipment, so that they might swoop on you with one assault. But it is no offence for you to lay down your arms [while you pray] if you are bothered by heavy rain, or suffering from illness; but you must always be on your guard. God has prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers.* (Verses 101-102)

At this particular juncture, the *sūrah* speaks of the concession God gives to those who migrate or go forth on earth, either on *jihād* or on business, should they fear being taken prisoner by the unbelievers or fear being subjected to hardship and pressure to turn away from their faith. The concession is to reduce prayer. This is different from shortening prayers, which is a concession given to any traveller, whether he has anything to fear from the unbelievers or not. The concession to which the passage refers is a special type. *"When you go forth on earth, you will incur no sin by shortening your prayers, if you have reason to fear that the unbelievers may cause you*

affliction. Truly, the unbelievers are your sworn enemies." (Verse 101)

A person who goes forth on earth always needs badly to maintain a proper relationship with his Lord. Such a relationship helps him to accomplish what he sets out to do, and complements his preparations and precautions. Prayer is the closest contact a man has with God and it is the weapon with which Muslims are invited to equip themselves when they encounter hardships and difficulties. Whenever they have something to fear or a difficult task to accomplish, God tells them: *"Seek strength in perseverance and in prayer."* (2: 45)

It is, therefore, mentioned here at the appropriate time, when it is most needed. Anyone experiencing fear or migrating to a new homeland is in the greatest need of refuge with God. Nevertheless, prayer in its ordinary form, including its normal movements of bowing and prostration, may deprive a traveller on the road of a chance to escape ambush. On the other hand, it may attract the attention of his enemies and they may be able to identify him or to take him unawares while he is bowing or prostrating. Hence, such travellers are granted the concession to reduce prayer when they have reason to be afraid.

We are more inclined to this understanding of this verse explained by Imām al-Jaşşāş. He is of the opinion that the concession given here does not mean a reduction of the number of *rak`ahs,* so as to allow such a traveller to pray two *rak`ahs* instead of four. This type of concession is given to all travellers, whether they have such fears or not. Indeed, such a shortening is preferred for a traveller, so as to follow the example of the Prophet, who shortened his prayers every time he travelled. The weightier opinion is that a traveller may not offer his prayer complete when he travels.

Hence, this new concession in situations of fear means a reduction in the form of prayer so as to pray, for example, in the standing position only, without adding any movement such as bowing, prostration or sitting in the middle or at the end of prayer. Such a traveller may offer his prayers while standing, or mounting his horse or camel, or travelling in a vehicle. He only needs to signal with his eyes indicating other movements. In this way, he does not neglect his contact with God. Nor does he neglect his most important weapon in the battle. He is on his guard against his enemies: *"Truly, the unbelievers are your sworn enemies."* (Verse 101)

In connection with this reference to prayer as offered by travellers who go forth on earth while fearing what the unbelievers may do to them, the form of prayer is outlined as offered by those who are on the battlefield. A number of psychological and educational touches are added to this particular piece of legislation. *"When you are with the believers and about to lead them in prayer, let one group of them stand up with you, holding on to their weapons. Then, after they have prostrated themselves, let them be*

behind you, while the other group, who have not yet prayed, shall come forward and pray with you, and let these be on their guard, holding on to their weapons. The unbelievers would love to see you oblivious of your weapons and your equipment, so that they might swoop on you with one assault. But it is no offence for you to lay down your arms (while you pray] if you are bothered by heavy rain, or suffering from illness; but you must always be on your guard. God has prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers." (Verse 102)

Anyone who tries to fathom the secrets of the Divine method of education represented by the Qur'ān will be amazed at the great number of psychological touches which penetrate deep into the human soul. Here we have an example of prayer on the battlefield. The Qur'ānic verse which we are looking at does not merely aim to explain the rulings concerning prayer in a state of fear. What we have here is part of the Qur'ānic efforts to educate the Muslim community in order to help both the individual and the community mature and fulfil their responsibilities.

The first thing which draws our attention is the determination to maintain prayer even on the battlefield. Yet, this is only natural from the point of view of faith. Since prayer is the main weapon in the battle, its use must be regulated in a way suitable to a military battle. Those men whose education was accomplished through the Qur'ān and in accordance with the Divine method used to face their enemies with the one weapon which gives them superiority over all others. They were superior because they believed in One deity whom they knew very well and whom they were certain would be with them in battle. Another factor in their superiority is their belief in a most noble cause. Moreover, their concept of the universe, life and the purpose of human existence, as well as their social system were elements which added to their superiority. Prayer symbolised all this and reminded them of it. Hence, it worked as a weapon; indeed the most effective weapon in the battle.

The next point to attract attention in this verse is the total spiritual mobilisation against the enemy as well as the warning to the believers to maintain total awareness of their enemy and what moves it may take. The enemies maintain a round-the-clock watch hoping for a moment of relaxation when the believers may lose sight of their weapons and equipment, so that they might swoop on them with one assault. These warnings are coupled with reassurance and encouragement to the believers. They are told that they are only facing an enemy who are certain to be humbled: *"God has prepared humiliating suffering for the unbelievers."* (Verse 102) Establishing such a balance between warning and confidence, and an emphasis on the need to be extra careful and giving reassurance is characteristic of the Divine method of educating believers and the Muslim community as a whole. In this way, it prepares them to face their wicked enemies.

Prayer in War and Peace

There are various views held by different scholars as to how prayer should be conducted in a state of fear, as at the time of fighting. However, they are all based on this text. We will limit ourselves to the general outline, without going into the various forms suggested.

> *When you are with the believers and about to lead them in prayer, let one group of them stand up with you, holding on to their weapons. Then, after they have prostrated themselves, let them be behind you, while the other group, who have not yet prayed, shall come forward and pray with you, and let these be on their guard, holding on to their weapons.* (Verse 102)

The verse suggests that when the Prophet leads the believers in prayer in battle, a section of them join him in the first *rak`ah,* while the other section stand behind them, weapons in hand, to protect them. When the first group complete the first *rak`ah,* they step back to take over the guard duty, while the other group who were guarding them step forward to join the Prophet in praying one *rak`ah* as well. When the imām finishes his two *rak`ahs,* he concludes his prayers. Then the first group complete their prayer with a second *rak`ah,* guarded by the second group. When they have finished, the second group completes their second *rak`ah,* while they are guarded by the first group. In this way, both groups have joined the Prophet in prayer, and the same applies to those who succeed him as heads of state or with the commanders of the Muslim armies.

Great emphasis is placed on the fact that Muslims need always to be on their guard: *"Let these be on their guard, holding on to their weapons. The unbelievers would love to see you oblivious of your weapons and your equipment, so that they might swoop on you with one assault."* (Verse 102) This statement speaks of a wish always entertained by the unbelievers. This has been confirmed across the centuries. It is for this reason that God takes care to explain it to the first Muslim generation as He defines their general plan of the battle. He even occasionally lays down their operational plan, as we have seen in the detailed instructions outlining how the Muslims should offer their prayers when they are in a state of fear.

The extra care required to be taken by the believers, and their total psychological mobilisation need not over afflict the believers. They implement it as best they can: *"But it is no offence for you to lay down your arms [while you pray] if you are bothered by heavy rain, or suffering from illness; but you must always be on your guard."* (Verse 102) In such cases, taking up one's arms may incur extra bother.

It may be sufficient only to be on one's guard, praying for God's help and the eventual victory: *"But you must always be on your guard. God has prepared humiliating*

suffering for the unbelievers." (Verse 102) It may be that through the continuous vigil and care taken by the believers that God brings about the humiliation and suffering which the unbelievers are certain to endure. Thus the believers may be the means through which God's will is done. This, in itself, gives them more reassurance and confidence that victory is to be theirs.

"And when you have performed your prayers, remember God standing, sitting, and lying down. When you are again secure, observe your prayers [fully]. Indeed, prayer is a time-related duty, binding on all believers." (Verse 103) This is a directive aimed at maintaining a relationship with God through prayer and in all situations. Such a relationship is the most effective weapon with which the believers equip themselves. When security replaces fear again, *"observe your prayers [fully]".* This means that prayers are then to be offered complete, without any reduction. It is a duty which must be offered at particular times. When the reasons for reducing it are removed, prayers must be offered in full.

It is on the basis of the Qur'ānic statement, *"Indeed, prayer is a time-related duty,"* that the scholars of the Żāhirī school of thought advocate their view that no prayer may be offered when its time has lapsed. A certain prayer is valid only at the time appointed for it. Once it is over, there can be no way for that prayer to be offered. Other scholars disagree and maintain that prayers may be offered in compensation after their time has lapsed, i.e. *Qađā'.* All of them, however, encourage attending to prayer early in the time range allowed for them. We prefer not to discuss such matters of detail here.

This passage concludes with an encouragement to the believers to continue with their *jihād,* despite the sacrifices they are called upon to offer. An inspiring touch is added which penetrates into the believers' hearts, explaining that the ends of the believers and unbelievers are widely different: *"Do not be faint of heart when you seek out the [enemy] host. If you happen to suffer pain, they also suffer pain as you do; while you hope to receive from God what they can never hope for. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 104)

These are simple words which draw the distinctive lines and reveal the great gulf that separates the two parties. The believers endure pain in the battlefield, but they are not alone in that. Their enemies also suffer pain and hardship. But their states are different. The believers seek God's pleasure and await His reward. The unbelievers suffer complete loss. They have nothing to expect from God either in this life or in the life to come. If the unbelievers remain steadfast in battle, the believers have all the more reason to do so. They can endure the pain more willingly and with determined perseverance. They need never stop pursuing the enemy until they have achieved complete victory. Thus, they can ensure that they live in a world where all submission is offered to God alone.

In every campaign of struggle, faith plays this great role. There are moments where the hardship and the pain are overpowering. It is then that a man needs to tap an additional source of strength. It is from faith that he can easily derive such strength.

This directive is given to the believers when they are engaged in an open battle, when the two sides are at parity, both have their weapons drawn, and both face the prospect of physical pain. It may happen that the believers have to engage in a battle in which their enemies enjoy superiority. This rule, however, holds true in all situations. Evil never enjoys security even when it triumphs. It suffers pain brought about by its internal conflict and by its clash with the very nature of things. The only way open to believers is to remain steadfast and not allow themselves to weaken. They must realise that their enemies also suffer pain, which may be of a different nature. Moreover, *"you hope to receive from God what they can never hope for."* (Verse 104) To remember this provides real consolation.

"God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise." (Verse 104) He knows what and how human beings feel, and He prescribes for the believers what helps them to overcome their pain and suffering.

10
Justice for All

We have bestowed this book on you from on high, setting forth the truth, so that you may judge between people in accordance with what God has taught you. Hence, do not contend with those who betray their trust. (105)

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ لِتَحۡكُمَ
بَيۡنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِمَآ أَرَىٰكَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَلَا تَكُن
لِّلۡخَآئِنِينَ خَصِيمٗا ١٠٥

Seek God's forgiveness, for God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (106)

وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرِ ٱللَّهَۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورٗا
رَّحِيمٗا ١٠٦

And do not argue on behalf of those who are false to their own selves. Indeed God does not love those who betray their trust and persist in sinful action. (107)

وَلَا تُجَٰدِلۡ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخۡتَانُونَ
أَنفُسَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ خَوَّانًا
أَثِيمٗا ١٠٧

They conceal their doings from men, but they cannot conceal them from God; for He is present with them when, in the darkness of the night, they agree all manner of sayings which displease Him. God certainly encompasses [with His knowledge] whatever they do. (108)

يَسۡتَخۡفُونَ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَا يَسۡتَخۡفُونَ مِنَ
ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ مَعَهُمۡ إِذۡ يُبَيِّتُونَ مَا لَا يَرۡضَىٰ
مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ مُحِيطًا
١٠٨

You may well argue on their behalf in the life of this world, but who is there to argue on their behalf with God on the Day of Resurrection, or who will be their advocate? (109)

هَٰٓأَنتُمۡ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ جَٰدَلۡتُمۡ عَنۡهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ
ٱلدُّنۡيَا فَمَن يُجَٰدِلُ ٱللَّهَ عَنۡهُمۡ يَوۡمَ
ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ أَم مَّن يَكُونُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَكِيلٗا ١٠٩

He who does evil or wrongs his own soul, and then prays to God to forgive him, shall find God Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (110)

وَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ سُوٓءًا أَوۡ يَظۡلِمۡ نَفۡسَهُۥ ثُمَّ

يَسْتَغْفِرِ ٱللَّهَ يَجِدِ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١١٠﴾

For he who commits a sin, does so to his own hurt. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (111)

وَمَن يَكْسِبْ إِثْمًا فَإِنَّمَا يَكْسِبُهُۥ عَلَىٰ
نَفْسِهِۦ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١١١﴾

But he who commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame therefore on an innocent person, burdens himself with both falsehood and a flagrant sin. (112)

وَمَن يَكْسِبْ خَطِيٓـَٔةً أَوْ إِثْمًا ثُمَّ يَرْمِ بِهِۦ
بَرِيٓـًٔا فَقَدِ ٱحْتَمَلَ بُهْتَٰنًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا ﴿١١٢﴾

But for God's grace to you and His mercy, some of them would indeed endeavour to lead you astray. Yet none but themselves do they lead astray. Nor can they harm you in any way. It is God who has bestowed this book on you from on high and given you wisdom, and has taught you what you did not know. God's favour on you is great indeed. (113)

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ لَهَمَّت
طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ أَن يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا
يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۖ وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ
مِن شَىْءٍ ۚ وَأَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُن تَعْلَمُ ۚ
وَكَانَ فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا ﴿١١٣﴾

Overview

This passage tells of a story which is unparalleled in the history of mankind. It is a story that proves, on its own, that the Qur'ān and this religion of Islam must, by necessity, originate with God. Human beings, no matter how sublime or idealistic they may be and how high the standard of purity and morality they may achieve, cannot on their own raise themselves to the standard drawn in these verses without being inspired by God Himself. The standard is as high as a line drawn over the horizon which people can only attain under Islam. They will never be able to achieve it except through the implementation of Islam.

It has to be remembered that the Jews in Madinah aimed all their vicious attacks against Islam and the Muslim community. This *sūrah* and the preceding two *sūrahs* give an account of only some of these attacks and their effect on the Muslim rank and file. They spread false rumours, fed the idolators' hatred of the Muslim community, encouraged the hypocrites and assisted their efforts to undermine the Muslims' unity, thereby confusing people. They even attacked the Prophet's leadership,

spreading doubts about his revelations and the message of Islam, trying to sow discord within the Muslim society. Their aim has always been to weaken it internally while at the same time encouraging its external enemies. All this took place at a time when Islam was still new, a young shoot forcing itself out in the midst of persistent weeds remaining from the old days of *ignorance.* Moreover, bonds of kinship and common interests uniting some Muslims with some of the idolaters, hypocrites and Jews were still strong. All this represented a real danger threatening the cohesion and unity of the new Muslim community.

At that highly critical juncture in the life of the new Muslim community in Madinah, this whole passage was revealed from on high giving instructions to God's Messenger and the Muslim community to ensure that justice was done to a Jewish person who was wrongly accused of theft. The passage also condemns the actions of a particular household among the Anṣār, who were at the time the main supporters and defenders of the Prophet's message and faith.

What standard of purity, justice and morality is this? Indeed, what words could justly describe this standard? For a certainty, whatever we say by way of comment or explanation is dwarfed by the sublime standards Islam sets and which human beings cannot attain on their own. Only when they give and work hard under the leadership of the Islamic code can they aspire to such heights.

Various reports mention the details of the story leading to the revelation of this passage. A group of the Anṣār, including Qatādah ibn al-Nu`mān and his uncle Rifā`ah, joined the Prophet on one of his military expeditions. A shield belonging to Rifā`ah was stolen and suspicions were raised about a man from the Anṣārī clan of Ubayriq. The shield owner reported this to the Prophet, saying that Ṭu`mah ibn Ubayriq had stolen his shield. [One report suggests that the man who stole it was Bashīr ibn Ubayriq, a hypocrite writing poetry denouncing the Prophet's Companions, but who always attributed his poetry to some bedouins.]

When the real thief realised what was happening, he took the shield and put it in the home of a Jew called Zayd ibn al-Samīn. He then informed some people of his clan of what he had done, confirming that if a search was mounted, the shield would be found in the Jew's home. They immediately went to the Prophet and said, "Messenger of God, our kinsman is innocent, and we have ascertained that the one who stole the shield is a person called —. We request you to declare our kinsman's innocence in public and to defend him. Unless God protects him by your kindness, he will be ruined." When the Prophet realised that the stolen article was found in the Jewish man's home, he declared Ibn Ubayriq's innocence in public, showing his sympathy for him.

Prior to the discovery of the shield in the Jew's home, Ibn Ubayriq's people said to

the Prophet: "Qatādah ibn al-Nu`mān and his uncle have made one of our families, which is known for strong faith and piety, a target for their accusation of thieving, without producing any evidence or proof to support their accusation." Qatādah mentions that he subsequently spoke to the Prophet. The Prophet told him: "How could you target your accusation of theft against a family of strong faith and piety, without producing any evidence in support of your accusation?" Qatādah reports that he went back feeling he would rather have lost a large portion of his property than spoken to the Prophet on this issue. His uncle Rifā`ah came over to learn of the Prophet's reaction, and when he was told, his only comment was: "I seek only God's help." It was shortly afterwards that this passage was revealed from on high to the Prophet.

When revelation had made the issues clear, the stolen armour was brought to the Prophet, and he returned it to Rifā`ah. Qatādah reports: "When I brought the armour to my uncle, who was an old man who had lost his eyesight, or much of it, in pre-Islamic days and whose firmness of belief in Islam was suspect, he said: `I am donating this armour for God's cause.' I then realised that my uncle's faith was strong and genuine."

Bashīr ibn Ubayriq then left Madinah to join the unbelievers. It is with reference to him that the following verses in this passage were revealed: *"But as for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, puts himself in contention with God's Messenger and follows a path other than that of the believers — him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure hell. How evil a journey's end. For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God has indeed gone far astray."* (Verses 115-16)

The question was not merely the acquittal of an innocent man who was the victim of a plot by a small group of people who wanted him to pay for a crime he did not commit. Although the acquittal of an innocent person is very serious indeed by God's standards, the question here was far larger. It simply aimed at establishing a standard that cannot be tilted to accommodate desire, or support for one's kin and crony. It is a standard that is not swayed by feelings of love or hatred, regardless of the circumstances.

The immediate objective was to purify the newly-emerging Muslim community, to treat the elements of human weakness that affected it and to eradicate narrow ties of affiliation in all their forms and guises, even though some of these may be based on religion itself. Ensuring complete justice between all people was paramount. The new community, unparalleled in human history, must be based on a clean and firm foundation, unaffected by personal or communal desires or interests and unswayed by prejudice or favouritism.

Had human or worldly standards or considerations been the deciding factor in the Islamic code and its method of implementation, there would have been several reasons to overlook the whole event. A cover- up would have been concocted and the reality of the matter would not have been exposed in such a way as to approach a scandal. The first and clearest reason was that the accused himself was a Jew belonging to a Jewish community which was engaged in a tooth and nail fight against Islam, using every piece of armament at its disposal. The Muslims of that period were suffering much from the Jews wicked designs. [God has willed that the Muslims should suffer of from the Jews at all times!] Those Jews in Madinah were not restrained by considerations of right or justice. They applied no moral standard in their dealings with the Muslim community.

Another reason stems from the fact that the issue directly concerned a group of the Anşār, the Muslims of Madinah who provided the Prophet and his Makkan Companions with refuge, support and protection. Such an incident could have easily caused much disunity and hatred among their different groups. To direct accusations at a Jew would have averted any likelihood of division among them.

A third reason for approving a cover-up was that it would have avoided giving the Jews in Madinah more armament with which to attack the Anşār. Exposure would allow the Jews to denounce the Anşār as stealing from one another and then falsely and knowingly accusing the Jews of committing their own crimes. The Jews were certain not to allow such an opportunity to pass them by.

But the real issue was far greater than all such considerations, which Islam views as trivial. The real issue was that of educating the newly- emerging Muslim community so that it could fulfil its duties of leading mankind in building a proper human life. The Muslim community could not undertake such tasks until it had adopted a unique system and method of implementation that surpassed everything that humanity had ever known, and until this system was firmly established in its practical life. Furthermore, the new Muslim community needed to be seriously tested so as to purge itself of all evil, weakness and ignorant practices. Its standard of justice needed to be unblemished by any worldly consideration so that it implemented justice between people regardless of any consideration of immediate interest or prejudice.

God, in His wisdom, deliberately chose this particular incident at that particular time, involving as it did a Jew belonging to a community continuously scheming against the Muslims and aiming to undermine the religion of Islam. Furthermore, it was a very critical time for the Muslims in Madinah, for they were facing hostility on all fronts, and in all these the Jews were involved. Nevertheless, God chose this particular incident and time to make His commands clear to the Muslims and to teach them whatever He wanted them to learn. No room was left for considerations

of diplomacy, politics or appeasement. No recourse was made to any device to hide any embarrassing or unpleasant facts.

The apparent interests of the Muslim community and its immediate circumstances were deliberately left out of consideration.

The matter was very serious indeed, allowing no room for pretence or deception. Its concerns were the Divine system and its basics, the Muslim community being prepared to advocate and implement this system, and justice among all people raised to the high standard that humanity never attained without God's revelations and support.

When one looks from such a sublime height at the rest of humanity throughout all ages, one finds all communities suffering. Between that height of Islamic justice and sinking human standards one also sees hard rocks scattered everywhere; cunning, deviousness, politics, skilful manipulation of facts, government, national and community interests, etc. When we examine these rocks and look carefully underneath them, we find only filth. When we look again, we see the Muslim community alone moving upwards, leaving those lowly depths and trying to reach sublimity. Such examples abound in human history, guided only by the unique system of Islam. As for that which people call, "justice", as practised in other communities, past and present, it is better not to remove the lid from it, in order not to let its foul smell disturb the clean and pure atmosphere of Islamic justice.

A Firm Stand in Support of Justice

> *We have bestowed this book on you from on high, setting forth the truth, so that you may judge between people in accordance with what God has taught you. Hence, do not contend with those who betray their trust. Seek God's forgiveness, for God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful. And do not argue on behalf of those who are false to their own selves. Indeed God does not love those who betray their trust and persist in sinful action. They conceal their doings from men, but they cannot conceal them from God; for He is present with them when, in the darkness of the night, they agree all manner of sayings which displease Him. God certainly encompasses [with His knowledge] whatever they do. You may well argue on their behalf in the life of this world, but who is there to argue on their behalf with God on the Day of Resurrection, or who will be their advocate?* (Verses 105-109)

The style here is very firm, smacking of anger in support of the truth. Real concern for justice is felt throughout the passage. The first aspect of this is the reminder to God's Messenger of the fact that God's book was, in truth, bestowed on him from on high so that he may arbitrate between people in accordance with what God imparted to him of true knowledge. This reminder is followed by an order requiring him never

to defend those who betray their trust. He must not contend for them or argue on their behalf. He is further directed to seek God's forgiveness for such arguments in their defence: *"We have bestowed this book on you from on high, setting forth the truth, so that you may judge between people in accordance with what God has taught you. Hence, do not contend with those who betray their trust. Seek God's forgiveness, for God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verses 105-6)

This command is then repeated once more. Those who are untrue to their trust on whose behalf the Prophet spoke out are further described as false even to themselves. The logic behind this order is the fact that God does not love people who engage in sinful practices and who betray their trust. *"And do not argue on behalf of those who are false to their own selves. Indeed God does not love those who betray their trust and persist in sinful action."* (Verse 107)

To all appearances, these people betrayed others, but in truth they have been false to themselves when they betrayed their community and the system and principles that make it unique among human communities. They also betrayed the trust given to the whole community, of which they themselves are a part. They betrayed themselves in another way, when they exposed themselves to sin and for which they incur severe punishment. Indeed, they incur God's displeasure and render themselves liable to His punishment. This is indeed a case of being false to oneself. A third aspect is that they stained themselves when they conspired against someone, for their conspiracy involved telling lies and playing false.

"Indeed God does not love those who betray their trust and persist in sinful action." (Verse 107) This is indeed a punishment far greater than any other punishment. It also gives a further impression whereby those whom God does not love cannot be defended by anyone. No one can take up their case when God dislikes them for their sin and treachery.

This is followed by a description of their unsavoury behaviour: *"They conceal their doings from men, but they cannot conceal them from God; for He is present with them when, in the darkness of the night, they agree all manner of sayings which displease Him."* (Verse 108) This is a contemptible situation that earns them nothing but scorn and derision. It is contemptible because of all that it shows of weakness and deviousness, particularly when they meet in the darkness of the night to devise their wicked plans. They do this in order to conceal their objectives and to hide it from people. Yet people cause them neither harm nor benefit. The One who is able to harm and benefit them, i.e. God, is with them, fully aware of what they scheme and what they try to conceal. He knows their intentions which lie behind the falsehood they devise. Thus, they incur His displeasure. What situation could be more contemptible than this?

"God certainly encompasses [with His knowledge] whatever they do." (Verse 108) This applies equally to everything in the universe. How can they, then, conceal whatever

they wish to hide when God is with them, aware of all that they do? In fact, He is watching over them and they are subject to His will and power.

The passage goes on to include a censure of all who tried to defend those who were untrue to their trust: *"You may well argue on their behalf in the life of this world, but who is there to argue on their behalf with God on the Day of Resurrection, or who will be their advocate?"* (Verse 109) There will certainly be no one to speak out for them on the Day of Judgement. What is the use, then, of taking up their case in life of this world when such defence will change nothing of what happens on that future day?

Responsibility for Action Taken by Individuals

Having stated its angry case against individuals who betray their trust, coupled with its strong censure of those who argue on their behalf, the *sūrah* states the general principles applicable to this deed, its effects, reckoning and reward, as well as the overall principle of just reward. It is with absolute justice that God deals with all His servants. He requires them to try their best to implement the same rule in their dealings and transactions. They should endeavour as hard as they can to adopt these standards of perfect justice: *"He who does evil or wrongs his own soul, and then prays to God to forgive him, shall find God Much-Forgiving, Merciful. For he who commits a sin, does so to his own hurt. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. But he who commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame therefore on an innocent person, burdens himself with both falsehood and a flagrant sin."* (Verses 110-112)

These three verses lay down the general principles that God applies in the treatment of His servants. People are well able to implement these in dealing with one another and with God. If they do, they spare themselves much harm.

The first verse leaves the door for repentance wide open for anyone who seeks God's forgiveness and acceptance. *"He who does evil or wrongs his own soul, and then prays to God to forgive him, shall find God Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verse 110) God is there, ready to forgive and bestow His abundant grace on anyone who turns to Him in repentance. Anyone who does evil wrongs himself and others. He may wrong only himself if his sinful action affects only his own person. In any case, God, the Merciful, the Beneficent, receives those who seek His forgiveness at all times, and extends to them His forgiveness and mercy. There is simply no condition, no intercession and no barrier between them and Him. Whenever they turn to Him in repentance, He turns to them in acceptance and bestows on them His grace.

The second verse establishes personal responsibility as the basis of the Islamic principle of requital for actions. This principle arouses in every heart a sense of reassurance mixed with a sense of fear. The fear is a result of what one may do and earn, and the reassurance is based on the fact that no one will bear responsibility for

anyone else's actions. *"For he who commits a sin, does so to his own hurt. God is indeed All- Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 111)

There is no inherited sin in Islam, such as that which the Church speaks about. No atonement is needed except that done by every individual for his or her own actions. Hence why everyone should be cautious lest they fall into sin. But at the same time, everyone is certain not to answer for others. This is the right balance established by a unique concept, based on absolute Divine justice which human beings are required to strive to emulate.

The third verse speaks of the crime of one who commits something sinful and who tries to put the blame for it on someone else. This is the situation that applies to the case in hand: *"But he who commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame therefore on an innocent person, burdens himself with both falsehood and a flagrant sin."* (Verse 112) The falsehood is that of knowingly accusing an innocent person and the sin is trying to put the blame for it at someone else's door. Both crimes now become his own burden.

These three rules describe the standard of justice the Qur'ān wants to lay down. It is a standard which holds every individual accountable for his or her own actions. It does not allow any offender to escape, only because he is able to put the blame for it on others. At the same time, it opens the door wide for repentance and forgiveness. It gives those who repent an open appointment with God at every moment. They do not need to knock on the door; they can enter at any time to find only mercy and forgiveness.

Special Grace for the Prophet

Finally, God tells His Messenger of the favour He gave him when He protected him from deception by the conspirators. He, thus, exposed their plot by which they tried to conceal matters so that people would not know what they had plotted. Yet they do not hide themselves from God Who is aware of all their plotting. God also reminds His Messenger of His favours by which He gave him revelations and wisdom, as well as knowledge of what he did not know. This is a favour to all mankind represented by the noblest and most honourable one in God's sight: *"But for God's grace to you and His mercy, some of them would indeed endeavour to lead you astray. Yet none but themselves do they lead astray. Nor can they harm you in any way. It is God who has bestowed this book on you from on high and given you wisdom, and has taught you what you did not know. God's favour on you is great indeed."* (Verse 113)

This was but one of the numerous and diverse attempts which the enemies of Muĥammad, God's noble Messenger, tried in order to divert him away from the path of truth and justice. Each time, however, God bestowed on him grace in abundance,

leaving the schemers to rue their actions and sink into error. The history of the Prophet Muĥammad, (peace be upon him), is full of such attempts, the failure of his enemies and his own success when God guided him every time to the right way. In this verse, God reminds him of His grace and favours, reassuring him at the same time that such people will not harm him in the least. That in itself is an act of Divine grace.

Just as this particular favour is mentioned, with all its aspects of revealing the truth to the Prophet, so the greatest favour of all is also identified. That is, the favour of choosing him to be God's Messenger: *"It is God who has bestowed this book on you from on high and given you wisdom, and has taught you what you did not know. God's favour on you is great indeed."* (Verse 113)

It is a favour God has granted to all mankind, heralding a re-birth of man so that he may have a new upbringing similar to that he enjoyed when God's spirit was first breathed into him. It is the favour that picked humanity up from the depths of *ignorance,* helping it rise to the highest zenith attainable by man through the Divine constitution and the system it lays down for human life. It is a favour that cannot be truly appreciated except by one who knows what it means to live under ignorant systems, past or present, and under Islam, or one who has experienced both.

It is because God's Messenger was the first to realise this favour and the noblest and wisest person ever to experience it, that the reminder is given to him personally: *"It is God who ... has taught you what you did not know. God's favour on you is great indeed."* (Verse 113)

11
Beliefs That Degrade Mankind

No good comes out of much of their secret talks; except for one who enjoins charity, or justice, or setting things right between people. To him who does this out of a longing for God's goodly acceptance We shall in time grant a rich reward. (114)

۞ لَّا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّن نَّجْوَىٰهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ
أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَٰحٍۭ بَيْنَ
ٱلنَّاسِ ۚ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ ٱبْتِغَآءَ
مَرْضَاتِ ٱللَّهِ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا
﴿١١٤﴾

But as for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, puts himself in contention with God's Messenger and follows a path other than that of the believers — him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure hell. How evil a journey's end. (115)

وَمَن يُشَاقِقِ ٱلرَّسُولَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ
ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
نُوَلِّهِۦ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصْلِهِۦ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَسَآءَتْ
مَصِيرًا ﴿١١٥﴾

For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God has indeed gone far astray. (116)

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا
دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَمَن يُشْرِكْ
بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلًۢا بَعِيدًا ﴿١١٦﴾

In His stead, they invoke only lifeless symbols — thus invoking none but a rebellious Satan, (117)

إِن يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ إِنَٰثًا وَإِن
يَدْعُونَ إِلَّا شَيْطَٰنًا مَّرِيدًا ﴿١١٧﴾

whom God has rejected, for he had said: "Of Your servants I shall indeed take my due share, (118)

لَّعَنَهُ ٱللَّهُ ۘ وَقَالَ لَأَتَّخِذَنَّ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ
نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا ﴿١١٨﴾

and shall certainly lead them astray, and fill them with vain desires; and I shall command them — and they will slit the ears of cattle [in idolatrous sacrifice]; and I shall command them — and they will corrupt God's creation." But all who take Satan rather than God for their master do incur a manifest loss. (119)

وَلَأُضِلَّنَّهُمْ وَلَأُمَنِّيَنَّهُمْ وَلَآمُرَنَّهُمْ فَلَيُبَتِّكُنَّ ءَاذَانَ ٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ وَلَآمُرَنَّهُمْ فَلَيُغَيِّرُنَّ خَلْقَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَمَن يَتَّخِذِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنَ وَلِيًّا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا ١١٩

He [i.e. Satan] holds out promises to them, and fills them with vain desires, but whatever Satan promises is meant only to deceive them. (120)

يَعِدُهُمْ وَيُمَنِّيهِمْ ۖ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا ١٢٠

Such as these shall have Hell as their dwelling place. They shall find no way to escape from it. (121)

أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ عَنْهَا مَحِيصًا ١٢١

Yet those who believe and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which running waters flow, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. This is, in truth, God's promise. Whose word could be truer than God's? (122)

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۖ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقًّا ۚ وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ قِيلًا ١٢٢

It may not accord with your wishful thinking, nor with the wishful thinking of the people of earlier revelations. He who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him support. (123)

لَّيْسَ بِأَمَانِيِّكُمْ وَلَآ أَمَانِىِّ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ۗ مَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا يُجْزَ بِهِۦ وَلَا يَجِدْ لَهُۥ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ١٢٣

But anyone, be it man or woman, who does good deeds and is a believer, shall enter paradise and shall not suffer the least injustice. (124)

وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ مِن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا ١٢٤

Who could be of better faith than he who surrenders himself completely to God, does what is good, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false? For God has taken Abraham for a friend. (125)

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ
وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَٱتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ
وَٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ خَلِيلًا ﴿١٢٥﴾

To God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; and indeed God encompasses everything. (126)

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ
وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ مُّحِيطًا ﴿١٢٦﴾

Overview

This passage is closely linked to the previous one. Indeed, some of its verses comment on the events that followed the incident where an innocent Jew was accused of a crime he did not commit. One of the events in question is the apostasy of Bashīr ibn Ubayriq and his reversion to old, ignorant beliefs to which reference is made in this passage. The passage also talks about the concepts and beliefs of *Jāhiliyyah,* or ignorant society, clearly linking these to Satan. The passage makes it absolutely clear that the sin that will never be forgiven is that of associating any partner with God. He may forgive anything else, as He pleases.

The passage also refers to talks people have in secret and their plotting against each other, making it clear that much of this secret talk brings no good; a clear example being the falsely accused Jew. It outlines the types of secret talks which are acceptable to God. These include the urging of one another, in private, to do good, to donate to charity, and to bring about reconciliation between people, etc. It also outlines the reward for each type of talk as administered by God.

The passage finally states the absolutely fair rules of requital by God for human actions. This is not subject to anyone's desire or preference. Indeed, it has nothing to do with the desires of either the Muslim community or the followers of other Divine religions. Requital is based on God's absolute justice and on the truth which yields to no one's desire. Had truth been subject to people's desires, the heavens and earth would have been set along the road to utter corruption.

As we see, the whole passage is closely linked, in subject matter and treatment, to the preceding one. On the other hand, it formulates a part of the judicious method of education that prepares the Muslim community for its guiding role, so that it may assume the leadership of humanity by virtue of its superior education and

organisation. The passage deals with some aspects of human weakness and some of the remaining practices of the old ignorant community. Thus, the Qur'ān helps make the Muslim community ready to fulfil its task in the confrontation with opposing camps. This is the ultimate objective of this *sūrah* in all its themes, and of the Qur'ān as a whole.

Useless Secret Talking

> *No good comes out of much of their secret talks; except for one who enjoins charity, or justice, or setting things right between people. To him who does this out of a longing for God's goodly acceptance We shall in time grant a rich reward.* (Verse 114)

The order to refrain from secret talks is repeated more than once in the Qur'ān. Here, it is a group of people who meet away from the rest of the Muslim community and leadership in order to decide on a certain matter in secret. The Islamic method of education and organisation in the Muslim community was such that any person could put his question or problem to the Prophet, either in private if the matter was personal, or in public, if it was of common interest. The aim was that no "pockets" should be formed within the Muslim community and that no groups be isolated by concepts, interests, ideas or aims different from the rest of the Muslim community. No group within the Muslim community should decide on any matter under the cover of darkness, and then either confront the community with it as a *fait accompli,* or conceal it. Whatever such a group may do, it cannot conceal its action from God who remains present in all situations. The prohibition of secret talks in this case is only one of several Qur'ānic references objecting to such clandestine dealings, away from the rest of the Muslim community.

It was in the mosque that the Muslim community usually met to offer worship and to conduct its life affairs. The whole community was an open one, dealing with all its problems publicly, unless these pertained to military engagements with the enemy, or were of a highly personal and private nature. Hence, this open society remained clean, maintaining a pure atmosphere. None but conspiring enemies, harbouring ill intentions or trying to subvert Islam's guiding principles, isolated themselves in such a community. Furthermore, these were most likely to be hypocrites. Hence, secret talks by small groups have been linked in most cases to hypocrisy and the hypocrites.

This fact is very useful to us. A Muslim community must be free of such actions. Individuals in the Muslim community should refer to their leadership with whatever thoughts they may have or what occurs to them of ideas or problems.

The *sūrah* excludes types of secret talks that do not exactly belong to this category,

but which may take the same form: *"Except for one who enjoins charity, or justice, or setting things right between people."* (Verse 114) This means that one good person meets another and says, "Let us give something in charity to this or that person, for I have come to know from private sources that he is in need." Or he may urge him to do something good to maintain fairness between people, or invite him to work with him in order to bring reconciliation between two Muslims who are involved in a dispute. Such good people may collaborate to fulfil any of these objectives and they may decide in private on their line of action. This sort of thing is neither plotting nor conspiracy. Hence, the Qur'ān uses the word "enjoin" to describe it, even though its apparent form is the same as clandestine talking, as it involves one good person speaking to others in private, urging them to collaborate in some good action.

It is important, however, that the overriding motive is to earn God's pleasure: *"To him who does this out of a longing for God's goodly acceptance We shall in time grant a rich reward."* (Verse 114) There must he no element of holding favour against someone, or favouring a particular person with charity, or mending relations between favoured individuals. A person who enjoins such actions must not do so in pursuit of earning a good reputation for himself as one who loves charity and works hard to mend relations between people. Indeed, there must be no element of motive behind such good actions other than seeking God's pleasure. This is the determining factor which makes one good action easy to please God and earn a rich reward from Him, and one that incurs God's displeasure and is recorded by Him as a bad deed. The latter action may have the same appearance or form, but the difference is that it is undertaken for the wrong motives.

A Sin That Cannot Be Forgiven

> *But as for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, puts himself in contention with God's Messenger and follows a path other than that of the believers — him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure hell. How evil a journey's end. For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God has indeed gone far astray.* (Verses 115-16)

It is reported that the reason behind the revelation of these verses was that Bashīr ibn Ubayriq, who had joined the Muslim ranks, reverted to disbelief *"after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him."* Thus, he followed a different path to that of the believers. But the statement is general and applicable to every case in which a person puts himself in contention with God's Messenger. To be opposed to the Prophet is to disbelieve in God and His message.

The Arabic expression used in the original text of the Qur'ān and rendered here as

being "in contention" with the Prophet means, in its linguistic sense, taking a stand opposite to that taken by another. Hence to put oneself *"in contention with God's Messenger"* is to choose a life other than that followed by the Prophet. God's Messenger has come forward preaching a message that comprises a whole system for life, including faith and worship as well as a legal code legislating for all practical aspects of daily life. The faith and the legal code together constitute the body of this whole system. Should one part of it be adopted and the other neglected, then the whole body, and indeed the whole system, are in ruin. A person brings himself in contention with God's Messenger when he denies his system in total, or believes in parts of it and denies other parts, implementing the former and ignoring the latter.

It is an aspect of God's grace bestowed on mankind that they will not be doomed to suffer the punishment of hell until He has sent them a Messenger who explains to them His guidance but which they reject and choose falsehood instead. This shows the great extent of God's grace bestowed on man, a weak creature. When man, having ascertained the truth of God's guidance and the system He has revealed, still refuses to obey God's Messenger and implement the Divine system, then he is in contention with God's Messenger. Thus, does God condemn him to error, leaving him to follow the path he has chosen and allowing him to join the nonbelievers whose path he preferred. This is what condemning him to the punishment mentioned in the same verse actually means: *"But as for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, puts himself in contention with God's Messenger and follows a path other than that of the believers – him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure hell. How evil a journey's end."* (Verse 115)

The *sūrah* explains that this depressing end is inevitable because God's forgiveness may include every sin except that partners should be associated with Him. When any person continues to associate partners with God until he or she dies, then forgiveness will not be granted: *"For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God has indeed gone far astray."* (Verse 116)

As we have explained when commenting on a similar verse earlier, associating partners with God may take the form of open polytheism on the lines of old Arabian and other pagan beliefs. It may also take the form of denying that certain aspects of Godhead belong to God alone and claiming that these also belong to some human beings. A case in point is mentioned in the Qur'ān whereby the Jews and Christians treated their rabbis and priests as gods in association with God. They certainly did not offer any worship rituals to these, but they acknowledged their right to legislate for them. When the priests and rabbis enacted such legislation, forbidding certain things and making others lawful, and they accepted such legislation, they truly became idolaters. This is because they assigned to their priests and rabbis the most

important of God's attributes. Thus, God says of them that they have violated the orders to believe in God's oneness: "They have been ordered to take for worship none other than a single God." This means that they should address their worship to God alone and receive their laws only from Him.

Associating partners with God is the one sin that cannot be forgiven, if continued until a person dies. Forgiveness is open to all other sins, when God so wills. The reason for portraying the sin of associating partners with God as so great as to permit no forgiveness is that the perpetrator of such a sin goes beyond the boundaries of all goodness. His nature is corrupted beyond redemption: *"He who associates partners with God has indeed gone far astray." (Verses* 116) If only one thread of upright nature remains in sound condition, it will pull a person round to accepting the oneness of his Lord, even one hour before his death. But when he continues to associate partners with God until his last throes, then he has condemned himself to an awful doom: *"We ... shall cause him to endure hell. How evil a journey's end."* (Verse 115)

Legends and Superstitions

The *sūrah* now describes some of the superstitions of Arabian ignorance and the legends that the Arabs spread about God taking to Himself daughters, i.e. the angels, and the Arabs' worship of Satan, the angels and their idols. It describes some of their rituals, such as slitting the ears of some cattle as offerings to their deities, as well as their corrupting of God's creation, and their belief in other deities beside God. All this is contrary to the upright nature God has placed in man:

> *In His stead, they invoke only lifeless symbols — thus invoking none but a rebellious Satan, whom God has rejected, for he had said: "Of Your servants I shall indeed take my due share, and shall certainly lead them astray, and fill them with vain desires; and I shall command them — and they will slit the ears of cattle [in idolatrous sacrifice]; and I shall command them — and they will corrupt God's creation. But all who take Satan rather than God for their master do incur a manifest loss. He [i.e. Satan] holds out promises to them, and fills them with vain desires, but whatever Satan promises is meant only to deceive them."* (Verses 117-20)

In their days of ignorance, the Arabs alleged that the angels were God's daughters. They made statues representing these angels and gave them feminine names, such as Al-Lāt, Al-`Uzza, Manāt, etc. Then, they worshipped these statues or idols, allegedly representing God's daughters, in order to be closer to God. This was the case at least in the beginning, but then they forgot the original legend and worshipped the statues themselves. Indeed some of them worshipped the very stone from which the statues were made. Some of them also worshipped Satan himself. Al-Kalbī mentions that the

clan of Mulaiĥ, which belonged to the Khuzā`ah tribe, worshipped the *jinn.*

The statement here is of wider implication. The fact that they associated partners with God means that they actually invoked Satan and derived their beliefs from him. It is the same Satan who figures in the story of their original father, Adam, and whom God rejected for his disobedience and for his hostility to mankind. When he was so accursed, Satan nurtured an unabating hatred towards mankind which motivated him to seek permission to lead astray any human who does not seek refuge with God.

> *In His stead, they invoke only lifeless symbols — thus invoking none but a rebellious Satan, whom God has rejected, for he had said: "Of Your servants I shall indeed take my due share, and shall certainly lead them astray, and fill them with vain desires; and I shall command them — and they will slit the ears of cattle [in idolatrous sacrifice]; and I shall command them — and they will corrupt God's creation.* (Verses 117-19)

They invoke their old enemy, Satan, and receive from him all that leads them into manifest error. He has already declared his intention to divert a section of mankind away from Divine guidance, holding for them the prospect of satisfying their vain desires, whether it be some fleeting pleasure, false happiness, or of escaping ultimate punishment. He has also declared that he will persuade them to commit evil actions and perform stupid and legendary rituals, such as the slitting of the ears of cattle so that they become forbidden to ride or eat, although God has not prohibited them. He will also persuade them to change or corrupt God's creation by cutting off or altering some parts of the body of humans or animals, such as castrating slaves or tattooing a person and similarly altering God's creation. All this God has strictly forbidden.

When a human being feels that Satan, his old enemy, is actually the one who advocates such pagan rituals and practices, he is bound to feel that he must be cautious lest he should be tricked by his enemy. Islam makes the battle between man and Satan the main battle, and directs all the resources of a believer into combating Satan and the evil he spreads on earth. Thus, a believer joins God's party and fights under God's banner against Satan and his cronies. This is an ever-raging battle; it will never end. This because Satan will not stop waging it. A believer, on the other hand, will not ignore or withdraw from it. He knows that the choices available to him are either to join God's party or Satan's lot. There is no middle ground to hold. In this battle Satan is represented by all the vain desires he arouses, and by his followers who include all non-believers and all advocates of evil. A Muslim fights Satan himself and his followers in a long battle which lasts as long as life itself continues.

Whoever takes God for his patron will achieve success, and whoever takes Satan for his patron will end up in ruin: *"But all who take Satan rather than God for their*

master do incur a manifest loss." (Verse 119) The Qur'ān describes what Satan does with those who do his bidding in pursuing their vain desires: *"He [i.e. Satan] holds out promises to them, and fills them with vain desires, but whatever Satan promises is meant only to deceive them."* (Verse 120)

This is an example of raising the prospect of fulfilling desires which divert human nature away from faith into disbelief and associating partners with God. Had it not been for this temptation, human nature would have remained pure and responded to the guidance of faith. It is Satan's temptation which adorns the had deeds of a human being so that he sees them as fair. He promises man much gain and complete happiness when he follows the path of disobeying God. Thus, man joins him along that road. Satan then promises man that he will escape punishment in the hereafter, but this leads only to man's inevitable ruin: *"but whatever Satan promises is meant only to deceive them."* (Verse 120)

When the whole scene is portrayed in this form, with the old enemy setting the traps and tempting his victims, only those who are unwilling to see continue to remain oblivious to what is being plotted for them. They do not even try to see the destination to which they are being driven, and into what precipice they are being pushed.

This most touching of descriptions puts people on the alert, paints the battle in its true colours, and then follows the comment which shows the end result of those who succumb to Satan's temptation. They are the ones with whom he accomplishes his declared evil intentions. It also shows the end of those who escape from his wicked schemes because they truly believe in God. True believers are immune from Satan's wicked designs because, when he sought permission to try to seduce mankind, he received no permission to come near true believers. As they hold tight to God's guidance, Satan is shown to be very weak by comparison: *"He [i.e. Satan] holds out promises to them, and fills them with vain desires, but whatever Satan promises is meant only to deceive them. Such as these shall have Hell as their dwelling place. They shall find no way to escape from it. Yet those who believe and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which running waters flow, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. This is, in truth, God's promise. Whose word could be truer than Gods?"* (Verses 120-2)

The two far apart destinations, then, are hell as an inevitable dwelling place for those who patronise Satan and paradise, for ever, for those who are true believers. That is God's promise, and *"whose word could be truer than God's?"* (Verse 122)

The absolute truth of God's word is shown in marked contrast to all of Satan's deceptions and false temptations. The gulf is great indeed between one who believes in God's promise and one who is deluded by Satan.

Action and Reward

The *sūrah* follows this discussion with a statement of the basic Islamic rule that governs action and reward. What determines the type of requital a person receives is not wishful thinking. There is a basic principle, a rule to apply to all and a law that favours no one. The law applies equally to all communities. No one has any special relation of kinship with God. Hence, no one may claim special favour so as to have the rule violated or the law suspended for his own sake. Everyone will be requited according to his deeds, whether good or evil.

> *It may not accord with your wishful thinking, nor with the wishful thinking of the people of earlier revelations. He who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him support. But anyone, be it man or woman, who does good deeds and is a believer, shall enter paradise and shall not suffer the least injustice. Who could be of better faith than he who surrenders himself completely to God, does what is good, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false? For God has taken Abraham for a friend.* (Verses 123-5)

Both the Jews and Christians claimed to be God's children and beloved ones. Both also claimed: *"The fire will not touch us except for a few days."* (2: 80) And the Jews continue to assert that they are "God's chosen people." It may have occurred to some Muslims that they are truly the "best community ever raised for mankind", and that God is certain to forgive them whatever misdeeds they may have perpetrated, simply because they are Muslims.

These verses put the question right for all three communities. The only determining factor is a person's own deeds. All are, thus, referred to the same standard and criterion: complete submission to God alone, doing what is good, and following Abraham's creed. Indeed, the best faith is Islam, which is Abraham's creed based on total submission and self-surrender to God. The best deeds are those which aim for perfection, defined by the Prophet as "to worship God as though you were seeing Him, and to know that if you cannot see Him, He certainly sees you". Doing good, as the Prophet states, is required in all actions, even when we slaughter an animal for food. In such instances, we are required to place the animal comfortably and to sharpen our blades so that the animal does not suffer much at the point of death.

The Qur'ānic statement ensures equality between the two parts of the single soul

from whom all mankind originate with regard to action and requital. It also makes acceptance of people's deeds conditional on their believing in God. *"But anyone, be it man or woman, who does good deeds and is a believer, shall enter paradise and shall not suffer the least injustice."* (Verse 124) This statement is a clearly extends the same treatment to men and women. Furthermore, faith is the prerequisite for accepting anyone's deeds. Indeed, no action is of any value in God's measure unless it is based on, and motivated by faith. This is both natural and logical. It is belief in God that gives a good deed a proper r concept and a clear purpose. It also makes such a good deed a natural and consistent line of action. It is no longer a response to a personal desire or a momentary impulse.

This clear statement is at variance with what Shaikh Muĥammad `Abdu (may God bless his soul) stated in his commentary on the verse: *"Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it then."* (99: 7) He considers this statement to be applicable to Muslims and non- Muslims alike. The fact is that other clear statements make this totally incorrect. The same applies to what Shaikh al-Marāghī (may God bless his soul) also states. We have referred to this in the last volume of this work.

Requital of Believers' Bad Deeds

"He who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him support." (Verse 123) This statement was tough on the Muslims, for in it they recognised their weaknesses and the fact that no matter how good a person is and how much good works he does, he will inevitably do some evil. They knew what it means in reality to be human. Hence, they knew themselves. They did not try to delude themselves or hide their own tendencies. Nor did they ignore or conceal the weakness they sometimes felt within themselves. Hence, they were very apprehensive when they were told that they would be requited for every bad deed they committed. They shuddered as though they were facing the results here and now. This was their distinctive characteristic: to feel the hereafter as though it were here now, and not merely as something that will eventually, without doubt, come. To them, it was close, not distant. Hence, their anguish at this most serious of warnings.

Imām Aĥmad relates: "I am told that Abū Bakr said to God's Messenger: How is anyone to prosper now that this verse has been revealed: *'It may not accord with your wishful thinking, nor with the wishful thinking of the people of earlier revelations. He who does evil shall be requited for it.'* We will be requited for every bad deed we commit. The Prophet said: `May God forgive you, Abū Bakr! Do you not fall ill? Do you not get tired? Do you not feel distress? Do you not experience hardship?' Abū Bakr answered in the affirmative, and then the Prophet said: All that is part of your requital.'" (This *ĥadīth* is also related by al-Ĥākim.)

Another *ĥadīth* reports Abū Bakr as saying: "I was with the Prophet when a verse was revealed stating: *'He who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him support.'* The Prophet said to me, 'Shall I teach you a verse that has been revealed to me.' I requested him to teach it to me. I had never experienced terrible pain in my back until I had reflected on it. The Prophet said, 'What is wrong with you, Abū Bakr?' I said: 'Who of us has not done bad deeds? Are we to be requited for every bad deed we perpetrate?' God's Messenger said: As for you, Abū Bakr, and your friends, the believers, you will be requited for all that in the life of this world, so that you will have no sin recorded against you when you meet God. As for the others, their deeds will be put together so that they will be requited for such deeds on the Day of Judgement." (Related by al-Tirmidhī.)

`Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, reports: "I said, `Messenger of God, I know the hardest verse in the Qur'ān.' When he asked me to name it, I said, *'He who does evil shall be requited for it.'* He replied: `That refers to what a believer suffers in this world, even every adverse experience.'" (Related by al-Ţabarī.)

Abū Hurayrah states: "When the verse, '*He who does evil shall be requited for it,'* was revealed, the Muslims felt it too hard. God's Messenger said to them: `Take it easy and do your best. Whatever happens to a Muslim counts as requital, even a thorn pricking his skin or an adverse experience. — (Related by Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī.]

At any rate, this was one part of the process of developing a proper and accurate concept of the rule of action and reward in Islam. It was of paramount importance in making such a concept perfectly accurate and in helping to set believers' practices on the right way. The verse shook them because they took all matters related to their faith very seriously. They realised that whatever God promises will come true, both in this life and in the life to come.

Dominion of the Universe

The passage concludes with a comment on the whole question of action and reward, as well as the earlier question of faith and disbelief. This comment makes it clear that all the heavens and earth belong to God, who encompasses all that is in life and beyond it: *"To God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; and indeed God encompasses everything."* (Verse 126)

When the oneness of the Godhead is mentioned in the Qur'ān, it is often coupled with a mention that all dominion, power and authority also belong to God alone. Islamic monotheism does not only relate to God's being only. It is a positive monotheism which applies to action that influences the whole universe and to real

and active authority in the universe as well.

When a person realises that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and earth, and that He encompasses everything, so that nothing escapes His knowledge or lies beyond His power, he has a strong motivation to acknowledge Him as the only God in the universe. This means that all worship is addressed to Him alone and His pleasure is sought through the implementation of His constitution and by obeying His orders. This is the logical conclusion, for everything belongs to Him, subject to His power and under His watchful eye.

Some philosophies acknowledge that God is one without partners, yet some of them negate His will, or His knowledge, or His power, or His dominion, etc. Such hollow ideas, calling themselves "philosophies", abound. However, any such creed is negative, having no effect on people's lives, or their moral values and practices, or their feelings and perceptions. It is all hollow, going no further than the words they use to express themselves.

In the Islamic doctrine, however, God is the overall King to whom all the heavens and earth belong. With His knowledge and power, He encompasses everything. Such a doctrine ensures that human conscience is set on the right track. Hence, people's practices are set right and human life itself prospers as it follows the right method.

12
Watching God in All Dealings

They ask you for rulings concerning women. Say, God [Himself] gives you His rulings concerning them, as well as what is conveyed to you through this Book about orphan women whom you deny what has been assigned to them, and you are disinclined to marry them; and concerning helpless children, and about your duty to treat orphans with fairness. Whatever good you may do, God knows it fully. (127)

وَيَسۡتَفۡتُونَكَ فِي ٱلنِّسَآءِۖ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُفۡتِيكُمۡ فِيهِنَّ وَمَا يُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ فِي يَتَٰمَى ٱلنِّسَآءِ ٱلَّٰتِي لَا تُؤۡتُونَهُنَّ مَا كُتِبَ لَهُنَّ وَتَرۡغَبُونَ أَن تَنكِحُوهُنَّ وَٱلۡمُسۡتَضۡعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلۡوِلۡدَٰنِ وَأَن تَقُومُواْ لِلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۚ وَمَا تَفۡعَلُواْ مِنۡ خَيۡرٖ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٗا ١٢٧

If a woman has reason to fear ill-treatment or desertion by her husband, it shall not be wrong for the two of them if they should try to set things peacefully to rights between them; for peace is best. Avarice is ever-present in human souls. If you act with kindness and are God-fearing, surely God is aware of all that you do. (128)

وَإِنِ ٱمۡرَأَةٌ خَافَتۡ مِنۢ بَعۡلِهَا نُشُوزًا أَوۡ إِعۡرَاضٗا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡهِمَآ أَن يُصۡلِحَا بَيۡنَهُمَا صُلۡحٗاۚ وَٱلصُّلۡحُ خَيۡرٞۗ وَأُحۡضِرَتِ ٱلۡأَنفُسُ ٱلشُّحَّۚ وَإِن تُحۡسِنُواْ وَتَتَّقُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٗا ١٢٨

In no way can you maintain equity between your wives, even though you may be keen to do so. Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of suspense. If you put things to rights and are God-fearing, God is indeed Much-

وَلَن تَسۡتَطِيعُوٓاْ أَن تَعۡدِلُواْ بَيۡنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَلَوۡ حَرَصۡتُمۡۖ فَلَا تَمِيلُواْ كُلَّ ٱلۡمَيۡلِ فَتَذَرُوهَا كَٱلۡمُعَلَّقَةِۚ وَإِن تُصۡلِحُواْ

وَتَتَّقُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ١٢٩

Forgiving, Merciful. (129)

وَإِن يَتَفَرَّقَا يُغْنِ ٱللَّهُ كُلًّا مِّن سَعَتِهِۦ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعًا حَكِيمًا ١٣٠

But if the two separate, God shall provide for each of them out of His abundance: God is indeed Munificent, Wise. (130)

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَلَقَدْ وَصَّيْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنِ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ وَإِن تَكْفُرُوا۟ فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَنِيًّا حَمِيدًا ١٣١

To God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. We have indeed enjoined those who were granted revelations before your time, as well as yourselves, to always be God- fearing. If you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy. (131)

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ١٣٢

And to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is your All-Sufficient Guardian. (132)

إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ أَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَيَأْتِ بِـَٔاخَرِينَ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ قَدِيرًا ١٣٣

If He so wills, He can take you, mankind, and replace you by others. This He surely has the power to do. (133)

مَّن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنْيَا فَعِندَ ٱللَّهِ ثَوَابُ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ سَمِيعًۢا بَصِيرًا ١٣٤

If anyone desires the rewards of this world, let him remember that with God are the rewards of this world and those of the life to come. God is indeed All- Hearing, All-Seeing. (134)

Overview

This passage complements what the early parts of this *sūrah* have set out to do. It aims to eradicate all traces of past ignorant days, still manifesting themselves in ideas and practices, especially concerning women, their place in society and the treatment

of other vulnerable groups such as orphans and children. The whole Muslim community needed to be purged of such traces in order to allow the family to be established on the basis that man and woman are two parts of a single soul and they both must be given their due and honourable positions. Their interests are to be looked after and family ties need to be strengthened. Any dispute that breaks out within the family should be settled early, before it develops and leads to a severing of ties and the destruction of homes. It is to be remembered that in such cases, the first to suffer are young children who are still in their formative years. The Muslim community, on the other hand must be established along the lines of looking after its vulnerable groups, so that they are not oppressed by those who wield power.

The present passage deals with certain aspects of family relationships, providing a linkage between them and the system that governs the universe. This imparts to us a feeling that the question of the status of women, the role of the family and care for the helpless and vulnerable in society are very serious matters. This is indeed the case. We have already spoken at length, when commenting on the early parts of this *sūrah,* on the way Islam views the family and its efforts to eradicate *ignorance* from the Muslim community in order to elevate its psychological, social, and moral standards. We should remind ourselves that only through such elevation did the Muslim community gain superiority over all other societies which do not believe in Islam and which do not conduct themselves according to its unique system.

The Rights of Orphan Girls

> *They ask you for rulings concerning women. Say, God [Himself] gives you His rulings concerning them, as well as what is conveyed to you through this Book about orphan women whom you deny what has been assigned to them, and you are disinclined to marry them; and concerning helpless children, and about your duty to treat orphans with fairness. Whatever good you may do, God knows it fully.* (Verse 127)

The verses with which the *sūrah* opens and which outline a number of regulations about women raised many questions in the Muslims' minds about different aspects of the position of women. Those in the newly-established Muslim community formulated questions which required rulings on different matters. This indicated a genuine desire on their part to know every ruling of their faith in all matters of life. The move they have made from *ignorance* to Islam had a far-reaching effect on their hearts. They felt that they needed to question everything they did in their pre-Islamic days, fearing that it might have been outlawed or modified by Islam. They wanted to be sure of the Islamic view on all matters. It is true that certain traces of *ignorance* lingered with them, but what was much more significant was their genuine desire to

make sure that their lifestyle was in conformity with Islam. Hence their questionings and their requests for explanations and rulings.

This was not merely an intellectual exercise, aiming only to learn a little more about this religion. They wanted to know in order to practise what they learned. The first generation of Muslims realised that they were born anew when they adopted this faith. Moreover, they considered the great change which took place in their lives as priceless. Hence, they feared to continue with any practices and habits that might be in conflict with Islam. Their anxiety and their resolve to follow whatever rulings Islam gave earned them a great favour indeed. God Himself took care of them and took it upon Himself to answer their queries.

"They ask you for rulings concerning women. Say, God [Himself' gives you His rulings concerning them." (Verse 127) They put their questions to God's Messenger (peace be upon him) but God, limitless is He in His glory, extends to them His favours and tells the Prophet to say to them: God will answer your questions about women and concerning the other matters mentioned in this verse. This is a gesture of great care and honour bestowed on the Muslim community, as God addresses them Himself, giving them the answers to their questions and explaining what they need in their new style of life. The ruling given here portrays a situation that existed in pre-Islamic Arabian society and which lingered on. It gives the required directive to elevate the Muslim community and to purge it of all traces of ignorance: *"Say, God [Himself] gives you His ruling concerning them, as well as what is conveyed to you through this Book about orphan women whom you deny what has been assigned to them, and you are disinclined to marry them; and concerning helpless children, and about your duty to treat orphans with fairness."* (Verse 127)

`Abdullāh ibn `Abbās is reported to have made the following comment on this verse: "In ignorant days, a man may have an orphan girl in his charge and he throws his dress over her. When he does that, no one is allowed to marry her. If she is pretty and he likes her, he marries her and takes all her wealth. If she is ugly, he prevents her from marrying until she dies, when he inherits her wealth. God has forbidden all that." Ibn `Abbās also explains that the phrase *"and concerning helpless children,"* refers to the fact that in pre-Islamic days, the Arabs used not to give any share of inheritance to their children or to their women. This is what is meant by the statement: *"Whom you deny what has been assigned to them."* Again, God has forbidden this. He has assigned to each his or her share, saying that a male inherits a share which is equivalent to the shares of two females. This applies to both young and grown up alike.

Sa`īd ibn Jubayr explains that the statement *"and about your duty to treat orphans with fairness"* refers to cases when an orphan girl is pretty. Her guardian may say: I am marrying her and taking her for myself. If she is not pretty and has no wealth, he

allows her to marry someone else after depriving her of whatever little she may have.

`Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, explains that this verse refers to a situation when a man is in charge of an orphan girl and he is also her heir. She may enter into some partnership with him. He may not want to marry her himself, as she may not be pretty. At the same time, he does not want her to marry anyone else, lest her husband become his partner. Her guardian, then, prevents her from marrying anyone. This verse was revealed to prohibit this practice. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

`Ā'ishah is also reported to have said: "People began to ask God's Messenger (peace be upon him) for rulings concerning women after the early verses of this *sūrah* were revealed. God then sent down this verse, telling the Prophet: *"They ask you for rulings concerning women. Say, God Himself you His rulings concerning them, as well as what is conveyed to you through this Book..."* (Verse 127) As for what God refers to as being conveyed through this book, it is simply the verse which occurs at the beginning of the *sūrah* and states: "*If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans, you may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four."* (Verse 3) Another statement attributed to `Ā'ishah suggests that God's statement about the disinclination to marry such orphans refers to the lack of desire on the part of a guardian to marry an orphan girl in his charge when she is plain and has little money of her own. This is, then, an order prohibiting Muslims to marry those orphans whom they desire only for their wealth or beauty, unless such a marriage is conducted with fairness and justice.

Traditional Injustice Removed

It is clear from these statements, as well as the Qur'ānic text itself, that orphan girls had a very raw deal in pre-Islamic Arabia. Such a girl suffered from the greed and injustice of her guardian. His greed prompted him to devour her wealth. If he decided to marry her, he would not give her a fair dowry. On the other hand, if her guardian did not marry her on account of her being plain, she still suffered injustice, because he would not allow her to marry someone else, so that her husband could not share with him her wealth.

The same sort of treatment was extended to children. Women and children were deprived of their shares of inheritance because they were powerless or they were classified as non-fighters. The tribal attitude at the time gave every right to those who were able to fight, and left nothing for the powerless who could not take part in the battle.

It is these ignoble traditions which Islam set out to change, replacing them with noble and humane traditions. This was not merely a great reform of Arabian society.

It was indeed a new birth which gave the Arabs a new character, different from their pre-Islamic one.

What is important to note is that this new birth was not preceded by any steps or developments preparing the way for it. Nor did it begin with a sudden economic or material change in the life of that Arabian society. The move from assigning rights of inheritance and possession on the basis of ability to fight to giving them on a purely humane basis was not the result of any newly-discovered ability on their part. Nor were children, orphan girls, and women given their rights of inheritance and ownership as the fruit of any new period of stability which reduced the importance of fighters. Indeed, fighters enjoyed even greater importance in the new regime. What had changed was that Islam came into being, and with it, there was a new birth of humanity, accomplished through a book and a new code of living. Thus, a new society was born in the same land and under the same conditions, without any revolutionary raising slogans of increasing national production or material wealth. There was only a revolution in concepts which led to this rebirth of humanity.

It is true that the new Qur'ānic system had to fight hard to erase the elements of ignorance within people and their social habits and traditions, and to replace these with new Islamic elements. It was also true that *ignorance* continued to resist such a change, leaving lingering traces in society and making their repeated reappearance in individual cases, or expressing itself in a variety of ways. What is important to state here is that the new system, revealed from on high, and the concept it formulated in the minds of its followers, resisted the pressures of the material world and brought about a total change in society. This change had far-reaching effects: it overhauled concepts, traditions and the whole social set-up. Neither the material conditions nor their inner "counter" elements, nor any change in the means of production nor any other Marxist hallucinations had any say in such a change. There was only one new element in the life of that nation. It was something sent down from on high. Hearts responded to it because it addressed their nature. The secret of this rebirth in man led to a total change in the whole life of society. It was the natural, positive interaction between human nature and the new system formulated by God.

Hard as the struggle might have been between the new and the old systems, and painful as the labour and the sacrifices might have been, the remarkable outcome was accomplished because the Divine message and the new faith were the prime movers. Moreover, the benefits of this achievement were not confined to Muslim society; they were extended to all humanity.

Therefore, it is only natural that this Qur'ānic statement, which gives the rulings of God regarding questions put to the Prophet concerning women, the rights of orphan girls, and helpless children, should conclude with further emphasis on the relationship between these rights and directives on the one hand, and the source of

this whole system on the other: *"Whatever good you may do, God knows it fully."* (Verse 127) Nothing good you do goes in vain. A believer addresses every action he takes to God. It is God's power that gives these directives their ability to influence people's thoughts and lifestyles.

It is not so important how directives and systems derive their influence and effectiveness in shaping human life. The gulf between directives and systems received from God, the Almighty, and ones formulated by fellow human beings is great indeed, even if we assume that both sets are equally good and equally valid. Needless to say, such an assumption is totally unrealistic. It is sufficient for any person to be aware of the source of a certain directive to assign to it its due significance. The importance of a Word said by God, the Most High, is different from that of a word said by a human being.

Equity That Cannot Be Maintained

The *sūrah* then moves a step further with family legislation as part of the general organisation of the society Islam wants to establish. It is a society based on the code God has bestowed from on high, not on changing worldly factors, which are often materialistic in nature and which often are to do with the production of goods and material riches.

> *If a woman has reason to fear ill-treatment or desertion by her husband, it shall not be wrong for the two of them if they should try to set things peacefully to rights between them; for peace is best. Avarice is ever-present in human souls. If you act with kindness and are God-fearing, surely God is aware of all that you do. In no way can you maintain equity between your wives, even though you may be keen to do so. Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of suspense. If you put things to rights and are God-fearing, God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful.* (Verses 128-129)

Earlier in this *sūrah,* Islamic legislation dealt with the state of rebellion or abuse when caused by a wife. It outlined the procedures that should be taken in order to preserve the structure of the family. At this juncture, we now have regulations dealing with abuse or desertion by the husband, which threatens the security and dignity of the woman as well as the security of the whole family. Feelings and inclinations might change. Islam is a system for life which deals with every detail and caters for every eventuality within the framework of its principles, values and the structure of the society it establishes.

If a woman fears being abandoned, which may be a step leading to divorce, the one legitimate thing God dislikes most, or if she fears being left in such a way that

gives her neither the status of a wife nor the freedom of a divorcee, then a remedy could take the form of her foregoing some of her rights, financial or otherwise. She may, for example, choose to forego part or all of her maintenance which her husband owes to her as a duty. If he has another wife whom she feels he prefers, while she herself may no longer have her feminine appeal, she may forego her right to have her husband stay with her on alternate nights. If she foregoes any such right, that decision must be made by her on the basis of absolutely free choice. Thus, she makes such a decision only if she feels that it is a better option for her: *"If a woman has reason to fear ill-treatment or desertion by her husband, it shall not be wrong for the two of them if they should try to set things peacefully to rights between them."* (Verse 128) By way of comment, a general statement follows to the effect that peace is better than quarrels, disputes or divorce: *"For peace is best."* This should help substitute kindness for hard feelings, and strengthen the desire to maintain family relationships.

In dealing with the human soul, Islam takes man as a whole, and utilises all the means it has at its disposal to elevate it to the most sublime level it is equipped to achieve by its very nature. At the same time, it neither ignores this nature nor tries to force on it anything of which it is not capable. It does not set a target for people and tell them: this is what you have to achieve, whether it is in your power or not. On the other hand, it does not condone weakness or praise human nature when it sinks to a lower depth, under the pretext that it is part of reality. Nor does it tie it to the sublime by its neck and leave it swinging in the air, tinder the pretext of elevating human nature. Islam is a middle road responding to human nature. It can be described as ideal practicality or practical idealism. It recognises that man is a singular creature who can put his feet firmly on the ground and, at the same time, allow his spirit to look up to heaven.

In giving this ruling, Islam is dealing with man with all his characteristics, but where one in particular is singled out: *"Avarice is ever present in human souls."* It is there all the time with all its aspects, material and spiritual. There may exist within the family certain causes which enhance the husband's avarice with regard to his wife. If she foregoes part of her deferred dowry or other financial rights, she may satisfy his greed and preserve her marriage. Similarly, if she foregoes her right to have him stay with her on alternate nights, if he has another wife, she may satisfy his emotional avarice and save her marriage. But all this can only come about by her free choice, according to what she deems to serve her interests best. There is no imposition here on her, rather a dispensation which gives her the freedom to decide in a matter which concerns her.

Islam does not stop here with this particular form of avarice, considering that it represents all aspects of the human soul and its nature. Instead, it proceeds to touch on other feelings and motives: *"If you act with kindness and are God-fearing, surely God*

is aware of all that you do." (Verse 128) Kindness and consciousness of God are, after all, the most important motives. A person who acts on their basis will lose nothing. God is aware of all our motives and actions. To arouse feelings of kindness and consciousness of God and to address man in the name of God, who is aware of everything we do, is a very effective way of influencing behaviour. Indeed, it is the sort of appeal which ensures the best results.

Another example of the ideal practicality or the practical idealism of Islam is provided in the next verse: *"In no way can you maintain equity between your wives, even though you may be keen to do so. Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of suspense. If you put things to rights and are God-fearing, God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verse 129)

God, who has created man, knows that he has feelings which he cannot control. Therefore, He has given man a way to direct these feelings, not to suppress or smother them. One such inclination is to be partial to one wife over and above other wives. Such partiality is beyond a man's control. He cannot easily suppress it. Islam does not hold man to account for something which is beyond his control. It does not make such partiality a sin incurring punishment. Otherwise, man would be torn apart choosing between alternatives with which he cannot cope. Islam takes a realistic view and tells people frankly that they cannot maintain equity between their wives, keen as they may be to do so, because the matter is beyond their control. There are, however, certain matters that are within their ability such as fairness in treatment, distribution of time, financial support and other marital obligations. Such fairness goes so far as to include the occasional smile and word of kindness. This they are required to do in order to regulate their partiality not to smother it.

"Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of suspense." (Verse 129) This partiality in outward treatment is what is forbidden because it deprives one wife of her rights and places her in a situation where she is neither a wife nor a divorcee. The prohibition is coupled with an effective appeal to believing hearts and a reassurance of overlooking what lies beyond man's control: *"If you put things to rights and are God-fearing, God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verse 129) Because Islam deals with the human soul with its unique temperament, which is the product of mixing a handful of clay with the breathing of God's spirit, and with its ideal practicality or practical idealism, the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) was the complete example of humanity when it attains its utmost perfection. That perfection is achieved when all characteristics and abilities within man are allowed to develop in a balanced and mutually complementary way within the limitations of human nature. As the Prophet of Islam extended his fair treatment to his wives and distributed his time equally between them, he did not deny that in love and affection he was more inclined towards some

of them than others. He recognised that that was beyond his control. He used to say: "My Lord, this is how I divide between them what I can control. Do not blame me for that which You control and I do not."

But what happens when the marital relationship is so strained that it cannot be maintained? It may happen that both man and wife lose everything needed for a settled, happy family life. In such a situation, separation is better. Islam does not hold marital partners with ropes, chains and fetters. It maintains family life with affection, compassion, or else with a sense of duty and forbearance. If none of these elements can reconcile estranged hearts, Islam does not condemn them to a prison of hate, nor does it try to cover up a real and total breakdown of the marital relationship with a pretence of reconciliation that is only skin deep.

"But if the two separate, God shall provide for each of them out of His abundance: God is indeed Munificent, Wise." (Verse 130) This is a promise by God that He will give to each of the separating couple out of His own abundance what will be sufficient for them. He provides for all His servants and grants them of His grace what is suitable for every situation, according to His wisdom and knowledge.

When we study the Islamic system as it deals with feelings, motives and prejudices and as it provides solutions for practical situations, we are amazed at people turning away from such a simple, uncomplicated method devised especially for human life. It leads people from their lowly position, along the road to great heights, always giving them what is suitable for their nature and capabilities. It does not impose on them any course leading to a higher level of sublimity, unless this has roots within their own nature. What is more, Islam attains a standard which cannot be achieved through any other system, and, all the while, it maintains its ideal practicality or practical idealism.

Family Rules Related to Universal Law

We have to understand that these rules which are applicable to marriage and family life are only a part of an overall system which regulates human life as a whole. This system is, in turn, part of the law God has laid down for the whole universe to follow. It, therefore, fits well with the nature of the universe as well as with the nature of man who lives in the universe. This profound fact is central to the overall system. Therefore, rules which provided for the regulation of family life are followed by statements which relate them to the universal system, as well as God's power over, and His ownership of, everything in it. We also have a statement that God has given the same directive to all mankind in all the messages He has sent them, and a reminder of rewards in this life and in the life to come. Indeed, these are the bases upon which the whole system is founded: truth, justice, and fearing God.

> *But if the two separate, God shall provide for each of them out of His abundance: God is indeed Munificent, Wise. To God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. We have indeed enjoined those who were granted revelations before your time, as well as yourselves, to always be God-fearing. If you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy. And to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is your All- Sufficient Guardian. If He so wills, He can take you, mankind, and replace you by others. This He surely has the power to do. If anyone desires the rewards of this world, let him remember that with God are the rewards of this world and those of the life to come. God is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (Verses -130-134)*

Often rules and injunctions given in the Qur'ān are followed by a statement that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. The two are essentially interrelated: he who owns something has all power and authority over it. He alone has the right to establish the system he wants and to impose it on those who are under his dominion. Since God is the only owner, it follows that He alone has the authority to legislate to people. Of all Divine instructions, the one which is highlighted here and which has been given to all those who received messages from God is that which tells people to always fear God: *"To God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. We have indeed enjoined those who were granted revelations before your time, as well as yourselves, to always be God fearing."* (Verse 131)

The One who has real power is the one to be feared. Fearing Him ensures purity of motives and a keenness to implement His constitution and system with all its details.

The unbelievers are shown their insignificance in the universe which belongs to God. In His esteem, they count for little. He is able to replace them with others: *"If you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy. And to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is your All-Sufficient Guardian."* (Verses 131-2) As God enjoins them to be God-fearing, He makes it clear that their refusal to turn their back on His admonition will not affect Him in the least. Their disbelief will not decrease His kingdom in any way, for: *"To God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth... If He so wills, He can take you, mankind, and replace you by others. This He surely has the power to do."* (Verses 132-3) Moreover, He is able to substitute them for some other people or creature. He only enjoins them to fear Him for their own sake and for their own interest.

Islam states very clearly that man has a special position of honour with God, which elevates him over everything in the universe. Equally, Islam states that man sinks to abject depths when he disbelieves, transgresses, tyrannises and tries to usurp God's power. These are two opposite situations.

These comments are concluded with a reminder to those who are keen on having

a share of the riches of this life that God's grace is far greater and more bounteous than that. He can give rewards in this life and in the life to come. Those who limit their hopes and ambitions to this world only, can look far beyond to a greater reward in the hereafter which may he given in addition to what God grants them in this life: *"If anyone desires the rewards of this world, let him remember that with God are the rewards of this world and those of the life to come. God is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing."* (Verse 134)

It is indeed stupid and highly unbecoming of man to confine himself and his ambitions to this life only when he is able to seek and look forward to God's grace in both this life and the life to come. Enjoyment of both is guaranteed by implementing the well-integrated Islamic way of life which combines practicality with idealism. He is indeed capable of achieving the glory of human life, with his feet on the ground and his spirit in heaven. He moves about and conducts his affairs according to the rules which govern the earth while, at the same time, looking up to the sublime.

As these comments relate detailed Islamic legislations to God's law governing the whole of life, they also point to the great importance Islam assigns to the family. Otherwise, God would not have related family matters to these great issues and would not have emphasised the need to fear Him in all religions. God is able to replace erring people with others who follow His system and implement His law. This is a frightful prospect for human beings. Its statement here is indicative of the seriousness God attaches to the family and its importance in the code He has laid down for human life.

13
The Reality of Hypocrisy

۞ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ قَوَّٰمِينَ
بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ
ٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ ۚ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ
فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا ۖ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ
أَن تَعْدِلُوا۟ ۚ وَإِن تَلْوُۥٓا۟ أَوْ تُعْرِضُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١٣٥﴾

Believers! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice. If you distort [the truth] or decline to do justice, then [know that] God is indeed aware of all that you do. (135)

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ ءَامِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ
وَٱلْكِتَـٰبِ ٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ
وَٱلْكِتَـٰبِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ وَمَن
يَكْفُرْ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَلَـٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ
وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَـٰلًۢا بَعِيدًا
﴿١٣٦﴾

Believers! Do believe in God and His Messenger, and in the Book which He has bestowed from on high upon His Messenger, and in the Book which He sent down in earlier times. Anyone who denies God, His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, and the Last Day has indeed gone far astray. (136)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا۟ ثُمَّ ءَامَنُوا۟ ثُمَّ
كَفَرُوا۟ ثُمَّ ٱزْدَادُوا۟ كُفْرًا لَّمْ يَكُنِ ٱللَّهُ
لِيَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ وَلَا لِيَهْدِيَهُمْ سَبِيلًۢا ﴿١٣٧﴾

Those who come to believe, then reject faith, and again come to believe, and again reject the faith, and thereafter grow hardened in their disbelief, God will not forgive them, nor will He guide them in anyway. (137)

بَشِّرِ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣٨﴾

Happily announce to the hypocrites that grievous suffering awaits them. (138)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ أَوْلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۚ أَيَبْتَغُونَ عِندَهُمُ ٱلْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ ٱلْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا ﴿١٣٩﴾

They are those who take unbelievers for their allies in preference to believers. Is it honour they seek among them? Indeed all honour belongs to God. (139)

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا۟ مَعَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُوا۟ فِى حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّكُمْ إِذًا مِّثْلُهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ جَامِعُ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ فِى جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا ﴿١٤٠﴾

Already has He enjoined upon you in this Book that whenever you hear people deny the truth of God's revelations and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they talk on some other theme; or else, you will indeed become like them. Indeed, God will gather both the hypocrites and the unbelievers together in hell. (140)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَرَبَّصُونَ بِكُمْ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمْ فَتْحٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ قَالُوٓا۟ أَلَمْ نَكُن مَّعَكُمْ وَإِن كَانَ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ نَصِيبٌ قَالُوٓا۟ أَلَمْ نَسْتَحْوِذْ عَلَيْكُمْ وَنَمْنَعْكُم مِّنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۚ فَٱللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ وَلَن يَجْعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٤١﴾

[Hypocrites are] those who wait and watch what happens to you: if triumph comes to you from God, they say: "Were we not on your side?" But if the unbelievers gain a success, they say [to them]: "Have we not earned your affection by defending you against those believers?" It is God who will judge between you all on the Day of Resurrection. Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers. (141)

إِنَّ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ يُخَٰدِعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَٰدِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ قَامُوا۟ كُسَالَىٰ يُرَآءُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ

The hypocrites seek to deceive God, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom,

(142)	ٱللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٤٢﴾
wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor to those. For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way. (143)	مُّذَبْذَبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ لَآ إِلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَلَآ إِلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ۚ وَمَن يُضْلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٤٣﴾
Believers! Do not take the unbelievers for your allies in preference to the believers. Do you want to place before God a manifest proof against yourselves? (144)	يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَتَّخِذُوا۟ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ أَوْلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۚ أَتُرِيدُونَ أَن تَجْعَلُوا۟ لِلَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطَٰنًا مُّبِينًا ﴿١٤٤﴾
The hypocrites will be in the lowest depth of the fire, and you will find none who can give them support. (145)	إِنَّ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ فِى ٱلدَّرْكِ ٱلْأَسْفَلِ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ وَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا ﴿١٤٥﴾
Excepted shall be those who repent, live righteously, hold fast to God, and are more sincere in their faith in God. These shall be with the believers. God will in time grant a splendid reward for the believers. (146)	إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُوا۟ وَأَصْلَحُوا۟ وَٱعْتَصَمُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَأَخْلَصُوا۟ دِينَهُمْ لِلَّهِ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَعَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۖ وَسَوْفَ يُؤْتِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿١٤٦﴾
What can God gain by your punishment, if you are grateful and you believe? God is always responsive to gratitude, All-Knowing. (147)	مَّا يَفْعَلُ ٱللَّهُ بِعَذَابِكُمْ إِن شَكَرْتُمْ وَءَامَنتُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ شَاكِرًا عَلِيمًا ﴿١٤٧﴾

Overview

This passage provides another module in the process of the Muslim community's education to achieve the status God has assigned to it. He, Himself, describes it as "the best community ever raised for mankind." At the same time, it is part of the consistent line of action aiming to educate the human soul and cure it of all deviation

and error. It is a line determined by God, the Creator of the human soul who knows its complexity, nature, desires, aspirations, ability and potential.

This module outlines the basic education process which applies to all generations, and which aims to elevate people from whatever standard they may be at to the heights Islam wants mankind to achieve. At the same time, it gives us a picture of the prevailing situation of the first Muslim community addressed by the Qur'ān. It gives a true image of that community with all its human aspects, including its strengths and weaknesses, traces of their past days of *ignorance* and their instinctive feelings. It shows the Islamic method of treating and strengthening the human soul, and encouraging it to stick to the truth of Islam, with all that involves of hard work and sacrifice.

The passage begins with an address to the Muslim community to fulfil the duties its role implies. This means to uphold absolute justice, attaining an ideal standard never before achieved in history except through this Muslim community. It is a standard of justice which requires the community to deal directly with God, disregarding every emotion, prejudice or interest, including what is often called community or national interests. Its only aim is to maintain the God- fearing path which leads to earning His pleasure. It is the sort of justice of which the *sūrah* had already given an example of in the case of the wrongly accused Jew related in Chapter 10.

As God makes it clear that the believers are to maintain justice in this particular fashion, He knows the hard efforts required to achieve it. People have to overcome their natural weaknesses, their own selfishness, feelings towards relatives, the weak, the strong, the poor, the rich, parents and close relatives, and overcome their own friendships and hostilities. He certainly knows the difficulties involved, as human beings attempt to scale great heights, starting from a fine and slippery surface, and having no equipment other than their bond with God.

Another appeal to them is a renewed call to believe in all the constituent parts of complete faith, which means to believe in God, His angels, revealed books, messengers and the Day of Judgement. Each one of these constituents makes its own contribution to the complete faith and the Islamic concept of life. It is a concept superior to all concepts humanity has ever known and leads to all aspects of moral, social and organisational superiority as achieved by the first Muslim community. The seeds of such superiority are always there for any community of believers to achieve. It only needs to fulfil the requirements of the Islamic concept of life. Once it has done this, it will benefit from God's promise stated in this passage: *"Never will God allow the unbelievers a way (to win a complete triumph] over the believers."* (Verse 141)

The passage then launches a strong campaign against the hypocrites, using a

variety of tools. The hypocrites are those who continued with their hypocrisy as well as those who declared their unbelief after claiming to have accepted Islam. It describes the nature of hypocrisy, painting the ugly sights of what was perpetrated within the Muslim community. They would warmly welcome the believers when they were victorious, but when victory went the way of the unbelievers, the hypocrites would try to impress on them that they themselves, [i.e. the hypocrites], had ensured that victory. They approached prayer very reluctantly, putting on a show of piety. They vacillated from one side to another, and their vacillation was indicative of their shiftiness.

Included within this campaign are a number of directives and cautions addressed to the believers, which indicates the extent of the damage the hypocrites caused. From these we can understand how large a force the hypocrites represented and how far they could penetrate into the Muslim community and affect its overall situation. We should remember that this campaign had to take into consideration the realities of the Muslim community's situation at the time as also the need to take it by the hand and isolate it from the hypocrites. Hence, the believers are directed to avoid the hypocrites' social gatherings where the latter often ridiculed God's revelations stating that they did not believe in them. The believers were not commanded to impose a direct and complete boycott of the hypocrites. This indicates that there was a strong front of hypocrites able to move within the Muslim community in a way that rendered such a boycott either impractical or impossible.

Also included in this campaign are a number of cautions addressed to the believers, explaining the symptoms and preludes of hypocrisy so that they may avoid these. Most important among these are befriending the unbelievers, seeking their support and hoping to achieve honour through them. The *sūrah* makes it clear to the believers that all honour belongs to God, and that He will not allow the unbelievers to achieve a complete victory over the believers, as long as they fulfil their commitments. The passage also paints a horrid picture of the hypocrites both in this life and in the life to come, making it clear that they occupy the lowest position in hell.

All these directives and cautions are indicative of the Islamic method of treating people and situations. It does so within the prevailing circumstances and the abilities of the community, hoping to eventually replace it with a totally new situation. They also give us a glimpse of the Muslim community's situation and its attitude towards the unbelievers and the hypocrites who were in close collaboration against Islam.

From all this we gather a clear idea of the nature of the battle which the Muslim community had to fight under the guidance of the Qur'ān, and the methods the Qur'ān uses to provide such guidance for its followers. This is a continuing battle between faith and unfaith in all generations. The personalities and the methods of the

enemy may change, but their nature and standpoint never do.

All this explains the truth of the book, the Qur'ān, and its role in leading the Muslim community. This does not apply only to the past, for the Qur'ān was not revealed for one generation in preference to another. It is a revelation that provides guidance to the Muslim community in all ages and generations.

At the end of this passage we have a remarkable statement asserting that God has nothing to gain by tormenting His creatures. He does not require anything from them apart from to believe and be grateful. In no way does He need their faith or gratitude, but when they do demonstrate this, they stand to benefit a great deal and to improve their overall lives and conditions. Moreover, they will be prepared for the life to come, with the pure happiness they will experience there. However, should they reject the faith and sink into error, they only prepare themselves for punishment in hell, where the hypocrites are to be found in its lowest depths.

Justice in All Situations

> *Believers! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice. If you distort [the truth] or decline to do justice, then [know that] God is indeed aware of all that you do.* (Verse 135)

This is an address to the believers, using their new and unique status which ensures a true rebirth of their community. Indeed, they have enjoyed a rebirth of souls, principles, concepts and goals. They have been given a new trust and assigned a new task which places them as mankind's leaders and requires them to maintain justice among all people. Hence, addressing them by the very fact of their being believers is of special importance. It is because they are believers that they are being prepared to fulfil the duties commensurate with this greatest of trusts.

Here we see the wise Qur'ānic method of educating the Muslim community in full operation, preparing the addressees for their difficult duties: *"Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them."* (Verse 135) The trust they have been assigned is to maintain justice, in its absolute sense, in every situation. It is the sort of fairness which prevents aggression and oppression anywhere on earth. It guarantees justice between people, giving everyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, their rights. In their entitlement to justice, all people, believers and unbelievers, are equal in God's sight, as we have seen in the incident involving the Jewish man in Madinah. Similarly, relative and stranger, friend and foe, poor and rich are treated with

absolute equality.

"Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God." (Verse 135) This is something to be done, dealing directly with God and for His sake. It is not for the sake of anyone else for or against whom a testimony is given. Nor is it to serve the interests of any individual, group or community. It is not something that takes into account the circumstances of any particular case. It is a testimony given for God's sake, free of any desire, prejudice, interest or consideration.

"Even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin." (Verse 135) At this point, the Qur'ānic method of education tries to place a person firstly in opposition to himself and secondly against his feelings towards his parents and kin. This is a very difficult task, much more difficult than stating it verbally or understanding its significance theoretically. To put this into practice is totally different from having a mental picture of what it involves. It is only the person who tries to do it practically that can understand its difficulty. Nevertheless, the Qur'ānic method prepares the hearts of believers for this hard task, because it must be put into effect: the rule must be stated and human individuals must abide by it.

The Qur'ān also puts a person in opposition to his natural and social feelings. This when the person against whom one testifies is poor, claims our sympathy and help in his testimony or when his social background inherited from earlier days encourages witnesses to speak against him. The same applies in reverse. When a person involved is rich, social considerations or his own arrogance or other behaviour may encourage a testimony for or against him. All such feelings have their pull when encountered in reality. The Qur'ān wants us to face all such feelings as it prepares us to stand against ourselves or our own parents and relatives.

"Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them." (Verse 135) It is a hard task, just as we have said, time and again. When Islam pushed the believers to scale those heights, it produced in reality a miraculous situation, one which can never be fulfilled except under this magnificent Divine system.

"Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice." (Verse 135) Desires are of different types, some of which have already been mentioned. Love of oneself, one's immediate family and other relatives is one type of desire, as is sympathy with a poor person when giving testimony or arbitrating. Being courteous or hostile to a rich person is another type of desire. In a situation of being a witness or making judgement, taking sides with one's clan, tribe, community, nation or motherland is one desire, as is taking sides against one's enemies, even though they are enemies to our faith. Desires have many other forms and God prohibits that we be influenced by any one of them in such a way that we deviate from truth and justice.

The verse concludes with a clear warning against twisting the truth in one's testimony: *"If you distort [the truth] or decline to do justice, then [know that] God is indeed aware of all that you do."* (Verse 135) It is sufficient for a believer to remember that God

sees what he does to realise the seriousness of this warning and to tremble at what it means. We must not forget that this is addressed to people who really do believe.

`Abdullāh ibn Rawāĥah was sent by the Prophet to Khaybar to estimate the produce of its land. The Prophet had concluded arrangements with its people by which they would continue to cultivate the land there in return for half its produce. The other half belonged to the Muslims in Madinah. The Jews in Khaybar tried to bribe Ibn Rawāĥah in order that he should give them a favourable estimate. He said to them: "I have come to you from the person whom I love most. On the other hand, I dislike you more than I dislike your equivalent number of monkeys and pigs. Yet my love of him and hatred of you will not cause me to be unfair to you." They said: "It is on the basis of such fairness that the heavens and earth are set to prosper."

He was a man who had completed his education in the Prophet's school and under his own supervision, following that unique Divine curriculum. He was simply a human being who went through that hardest of experiences completing it successfully. He achieved, like many others, the miracle that is possible only through that sort of education.

Centuries then passed by after that special period in human history. Libraries are now the home of numerous books on all aspects of the law. Life is full of judicial systems, legal procedures and technicalities. Much has been said about justice, and many volumes speak about lengthy legal procedures. Theories, administrative authorities and systems of different types are available to regulate all this. But the proper experience of real justice, seeing it in practice and achieving its highest level has only been possible under the Islamic approach and practical system. It was seen first during that special period when it was at its zenith. It was then fulfilled by successive generations in the land where Islam was implemented, by hearts committed to this faith and through individuals and communities living under Islam and according to its teachings.

This fact must be truly appreciated by those who admire modern legal processes and procedures and sophisticated legal systems. They often think that all this is more conducive to achieving justice than under the simple system of that unique period witnessed many centuries ago. They feel that today's procedures are tighter and better controlled than that distant simple form. But all this is a myth entertained by those who are often deceived by magnitude and form. They do not realise the truth that it was only the Divine system that achieved that highest grade of fairness, despite the simplicity of its system and procedure. It is the only system that can today achieve the same high standard, taking into consideration all that has been introduced of new systems and procedures.

We do not mean that we need to dismantle modern legal systems. What we should know is that it is not the system that creates justice, but the spirit behind the system, whatever form and shape it may take and regardless of the time and place where it is applied.

A Call to Believers to Believe

"Believers! Do believe in God and His Messenger, and in the Book which He has bestowed from on high upon His Messenger, and in the Book which He sent down in earlier times. Anyone who denies God, His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, and the Last Day has indeed gone far astray." (Verse 136) This is the second address made in this passage to the believers, outlining their roles and duties, and in their capacity which distinguishes them from all those around them. It also provides a link for them with the source from which they derive strength and receive help in fulfilling their tasks.

"Believers! Do believe in God and His Messenger, and in the Book which He has bestowed from on high upon His Messenger, and in the Book which He sent down in earlier times." (Verse 136) This is an outline of the details in which the believers must believe. Thus, it formulates the basic Islamic concept of faith. It requires first a belief in God and His Messenger. It provides a bond between the believers and their Lord who created them and sent them someone to guide them to Him. This being the Prophet Muĥammad (peace be upon him). It also includes belief in his message and accepting all that he conveys to us as part of the Divine message.

This concept of faith also requires belief in the Book God has bestowed on his Messenger. This clearly shows the Muslims the system of life God has chosen for them, all the details of which are contained in this book. It also requires its full implementation, since it comes from the same source and follows the same lines. It is not possible to classify some of it as more deserving of acceptance or implementation. It is all one.

Similarly, there is a requirement to believe in the Book that was revealed earlier, since all revelations come from the same source, who is God Himself. They also have the same basis, namely, submission to God only, attributing Godhead and all its attributes to Him alone, acknowledging His system as the only one to be obeyed and implemented in human life. This unanimity of all books is the natural result of the fact that all these books were, in their original, undistorted form, revealed by God. The Divine approach and method are the same. What He wants for mankind has always been the same. All other systems lead to error while the Divine system will always lead to God's pleasure.

Belief in the whole "Book", in the sense that all Divine revelations are in essence one Book, is a special characteristic applicable only to the Muslim nation. The concept Islam outlines of God as the only Lord, His one system, approach and method are the only ones that fit with the truth of Godhead. They are also consistent with the fact that all humanity is the same, the fact that truth is one and that whatever is at variance with truth is deviant and erroneous.

Having made clear the command to believe, the Qur'ānic verse warns those who do not believe in all the components of faith. It outlines these again to make them clear before mentioning any punishment for disbelief. *"Anyone who denies God, His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, and the Last Day has indeed gone far astray."* (Verse 136) The first order in this verse mentions the need to believe in God, His

books and messengers, but does not mention belief in the angels. It is well known that God's books mention the angels and the Day of Judgement. Hence, when a person believes in these books, he or she is bound to believe in the angels and in the Day of Judgement. But the second order mentions this explicitly because it is an order spelling out punishment for failure to comply. Hence, a clear statement of all components is perfectly in order.

The expression of going far astray very often indicates a situation where a person is so grossly in error that there is little or no hope that he will ever be guided again. To believe in God is something deeply inherent in human nature. It moves us naturally to achieve it. Hence, a person who disbelieves in God, and in consequence disbelieves in His angels, books, messengers and in the Day of Judgement, is one whose nature has been so corrupted that all hope of a return to Divine guidance is practically lost.

Vacillation Between Belief and Disbelief

After this double address to the believers, the *sūrah* begins its hard campaign against hypocrisy and the hypocrites, starting with a description of a certain condition pertaining to them at the time. It describes the attitude of some of them, which is nearest the attitude of disbelievers: *"Those who come to believe, then reject faith, and again come to believe, and again reject the faith, and thereafter grow hardened in their disbelief God will not forgive them, nor will He guide them in any way"* (Verse 137)

When belief in God is preceded by disbelief, this earlier state is erased by the latter one and the person concerned is forgiven whatever he did prior to his acceptance of faith. It is understandable though that one who has never seen the light can sink further into the darkness. But to disbelieve after having known faith and accepted it, and to do it time and time again, is the most cardinal of sins. It cannot be justified or forgiven on any account. Disbelief is a thick curtain. When it is dropped, nature establishes its links with the Creator. The lost one is returned to the party, the plant is watered anew and the soul experiences a sweet taste that it never forgets; that is, the sweetness of faith. Hence, those who revert to disbelief, time and again, after having experienced faith are in deliberate defiance of their nature. By choice, they prefer to go deep into error. Hence, it is only fair that God should never forgive them or provide them with any guidance. It is they who, having known the way and travelled along it, decided to be misguided, choosing darkness after having seen the light.

Unless a person is dedicated in his following of God's guidance, he will never be free of the pressures of worldly situations, values, needs, interests and greed, or be unencumbered by aspirations and temptations. Nor will he feel the honour, dignity and exaltation experienced by a heart full of faith when he stands in opposition to

worldly values, powers and authority or confronts unfriendly people, events and situations.

This is where the seed of hypocrisy begins to germinate. In essence, hypocrisy signifies weakness to hold on to the truth when confronting falsehood. Such a weakness is a result of fear and temptation, other than fearing God and hoping for His reward. It is the result of holding on to what may be established in isolation from the Divine system of life.

Here we see a clear relationship between talking about faith and giving a truthful testimony for God's sake on the one hand and talking about hypocrisy on the other. This is added to the overall occasion provided by the central theme of the *sūrah,* which is the education of the Muslim community on the basis of the Islamic system, removing the remaining traces of *ignorance,* mobilising the believers against their human weaknesses, and leading the community in its battle against the unbelievers and the hypocrites. In this general objective, the line of the *sūrah is* evident and consistent from start to finish.

After the image given in this verse of a group of hypocrites declaring their belief then going back on it, only to declare again that they believe before denying the faith once more and then growing harder in their disbelief, the rest of the passage is devoted to a discussion of hypocrisy and the hypocrites. It is here that the campaign against hypocrisy starts, utilising different ways and means worthy of careful examination and study. This will show us how this Divine system works in practice, producing its effects on people and their hearts.

> *Happily announce to the hypocrites that grievous suffering awaits them. They are those who take unbelievers for their allies in preference to believers. Is it honour they seek among them? Indeed all honour belongs to God. Already has He enjoined upon you in this Book that whenever you hear people deny the truth of God's revelations and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they talk on some other theme; or else, you will indeed become like them. Indeed, God will gather both the hypocrites and the unbelievers together in hell. [Hypocrites are] those who wait and watch what happens to you: if triumph comes to you from God, they say: "Were we not on your side?" But if the unbelievers gain a success, they say [to them]: `Have we not earned your affection by defending you against those believers?" It is God who will judge between you all on the Day of Resurrection. Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers. The hypocrites seek to deceive God, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom, wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor to those. For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way.* (Verses 138-43)

True Submission, True Freedom

The campaign begins with clear derision, which appears by using a phrase indicating a happy announcement instead of a warning, and in considering grievous suffering something to welcome like a very happy piece of news. The reasons that bring about such grievous suffering are then outlined. These are their close friendship with the non-believers in preference to the believers, their foul thinking of God and their misguided concept of the source of honour: *"Happily announce to the hypocrites that grievous suffering awaits them. They are those who take unbelievers for their allies in preference to believers. Is it honour they seek among them? Indeed all honour belongs to God."* (Verses 138-139)

The unbelievers mentioned here are, most probably, the Jews whom the hypocrites had befriended, and together they plotted all types of evil schemes against the believers. God Almighty asks disapprovingly why they take unbelievers for their allies when they profess to be believers? Why do they place themselves in such an untenable situation? Do they seek to receive honour and power from the unbelievers? All honour is the property of God alone. No one will get any of it unless he seeks it from Him and aspires to His protection.

Thus, the first point exposes the nature of the hypocrites and their first characteristic, which is their alliance with the unbelievers in preference to the believers. It also shows their lack of understanding of the balance of power. The unbelievers have no honour or might to impart to others as the hypocrites believe. It declares that all honour belongs to God, and it is to be sought from Him alone.

People should understand that they have only one source of support. When they seek this, they will find honour and protection. They will be able to feel their dignity and freedom. Otherwise, they will be enslaved by other values, traditions, people and fears. There will be none to protect them from such subjugation. On the other hand, submission to God alone imparts a true feeling of dignity and honour which frees them from all the humiliation which is attendant on submission to any other source or power. The choice is open for us all to make.

No one seeks honour from someone other than God and remains a believer. No one turns to God's enemies for support, strength and glory if he truly believes in God. Some people in our midst who claim to be Muslim and have Muslim names seek support from God's worst sworn enemies on earth. They should reflect on what the Qur'ān says, if they truly want to be Muslims. Otherwise, they should know that God does not stand in need of anyone.

A correlative of seeking honour from the unbelievers and making alliances with them in preference to the believers is that feeling of affinity to earlier generations who lived as unbelievers, holding this tie of ancestry as being of ongoing importance

to the present Muslim generation. This we see today when people ignorantly boast about the honour they feel as descendants of the Pharaohs, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Babylonians and the pagan tribes of Arabia. Imām Aĥmad ibn Ĥanbal reports that the Prophet says: "Whoever claims descent of nine unbelieving forefathers, seeking honour and pride, will be the tenth with them in hell." What we should know is that, from the Islamic point of view, the bond that blends a community is faith. The nation comprises all believers in God, from the beginning of history, in all places and across all generations. Nation, in Islam, consists of neither a succession of generations nor the inhabitants of a geographical area in a particular generation.

Ridiculing God's Words

The first degree of hypocrisy is when a believer sits with other people and keeps quiet when he hears God's revelations being denied and ridiculed. He may call that tolerance, or cunning, or broad-mindedness, or acceptance of freedom of thought, or whatever! In fact it is nothing but defeatism working within him. At first he may delude himself, ashamed to acknowledge his humiliating weakness.

Standing up to defend God's faith and revelation is the mark of true faith. When the willingness to do that weakens, everything else collapses and gets swept away. That anger for God's sake is deliberately suppressed at first, but then it weakens and dies away. A person who hears his faith being ridiculed by others has the choice to either stand up in defence of his faith or leave that place altogether. To sit down, turn a blind eye and keep quiet is the first stage of defeat. This is, indeed, the bridge of hypocrisy which carries a person from faith to disbelief.

Some Muslims in Madinah attended the gatherings of influential hypocrites. The Qur'ān alerts those believers to the fact that attending such gatherings and keeping quiet therein is the first sign of defeatism. The Qur'ān wanted to spare the Muslims that stage, but the prevailing circumstances did not allow that they should be ordered to boycott all these gatherings immediately. Hence, they were ordered to boycott them when they heard God's revelations being denied and ridiculed. Otherwise, to sit there would be hypocrisy with its horrible outcome: *"Already has He enjoined upon you in this Book that whenever you hear people deny the truth of God's revelations and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they talk on some other theme; or else, you will indeed become like them. Indeed, God will gather both the hypocrites and the unbelievers together in hell."* (Verse 140)

This verse refers to an earlier revelation in the Qur'ān itself. The reference is to a verse in *Sūrah* 6, entitled Cattle, which may be rendered in translation as follows: *"Whenever you meet people who indulge in [blasphemous] talk about Our revelations, turn*

your back upon them until they begin to talk of other things."[15] (6: 68)

The threat here is enough to make a believer tremble with dread: *"or else, you will indeed become like them".* (Verse 140) The prospect held out as the result of such friendship with those who ridicule God's revelations is so fearful that it does not allow for any further hesitation: *"Indeed, God will gather both the hypocrites and the unbelievers together in hell."* (Verse 140)

The prohibition is limited to attending gatherings where God's revelations are denied and ridiculed. It does not go further than that so as to impose a total ban on all relations with the hypocrites. This is indicative of the nature of the period when it was revealed and the stage at which the Muslim community was at the time. This could be repeated in later generations and in other environments. It also indicates that it is part of the nature of the Islamic system to move gradually, taking account of the remaining ties, existing feelings and prevailing circumstances, while moving steadily to its ultimate objective of a complete change of situation.

Characteristics of the Hypocrites

The *sūrah* moves on to describe the distinctive features of the hypocrites, painting a revolting image of them as they take one appearance when they meet the Muslims and change it completely when they are with the non-believers. They try to hold the stick from the middle, shifting ground like stealthy snakes and horrid worms: *"[Hypocrites are] those who wait and watch what happens to you: if triumph comes to you from God, they say: "Were we not on your side?" But if the unbelievers gain a success, they say [to them]: "Have we not earned your affection by defending you against those believers?" It is God who will judge between you all on the Day of Resurrection. Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers."* (Verse 141)

The image drawn here is very ugly, showing first the hatred the hypocrites harbour towards the Muslim community and the fact that they are always on the look out for an opportunity when they can harm the Muslims. At the same time, they pretend to be very friendly towards the Muslims, particularly when they are victorious. They even come up with the rhetorical question, *"Were we not on your side?"* What they mean is that they were with them in the battle. Indeed, they sometimes went out with the Muslim army, trying to weaken the resolve of the fighters and create discord in their ranks. Or they may mean to say simply that they were giving them mental support and providing them with much needed backing in the rear.

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[15] Although this verse occurs in a later *sūrah* in the Qur'ān, it was revealed earlier. *Sūrah* 6 was revealed in Makkah, several years before the revelation of *Sūrah* 4, which is the subject matter of this volume. We will tackle *Sūrah* 6 in Volume V, God willing.

"But if the unbelievers gain a success, they say [to them]: `Have we not earned your affection by defending you against those believers?" (Verse 141) Saying so, they mean that they gave the non-believers active support, ensuring that their back was well protected, trying at the same time to weaken the Muslim front. Thus, do they shift their ground like snakes. In their heart there is poison, and on their tongues there is hypocrisy. Yet they are weak, portraying a sickening image that fills any true believer with disgust. Such a portrait indicates one of the ways the Qur'ān uses to educate believers.

The policy the Prophet followed with regard to the hypocrites, as directed by God, was to overlook their actions and turn away from them, while warning the believers as to their designs. This was a first stage towards the overall goal of liquidating that hateful front. However, in line with this policy, the Qur'ān leaves judgement in their case to the hereafter when they will be completely exposed and receive their fair punishment: *"It is God who will judge between you all on the Day of Resurrection."* (Verse 141) On that day there will be no room for evil scheming or conspiracy. Nor will there be a chance of concealing what people truly feel.

The believers are then reassured by a definite promise from God that all such stealthy scheming and all conspiratorial activities in collaboration with the non-believers will in no way change the balance of power. God will not allow the non-believers to overpower the believers: *"Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers."* (Verse 141)

As regards the meaning of this statement a report suggests that it applies to the Day of Resurrection when God will judge between the Muslims and the hypocrites. At that point, the non-believers have no means of scoring a triumph against the believers. Another report suggests that the statement applies in this life, whereby God will never give the unbelievers a chance to eradicate the believers, although they may at times score a victory against the Muslims in some battles.

A Promise That Will Never Fail

It is perhaps more accurate to read the statement as applicable to both this life and the life to come, because it includes nothing to limit its application one way or the other. As for the life to come, the question does not need any new emphasis. However, in this life, appearances may indicate that this is not the case. But these are deceptive appearances which need to be carefully examined. The statement provides a definite promise and a clear, permanent ruling: whenever the truth of faith is firmly established in believers' hearts so as to become their way of life, system of government, and when it manifests itself in their dedication to God's cause in all respects, and when they address their worship to God in all matters, large and small,

then God will not allow the unbelievers to score a triumph over them. This is a fact that has never been breached on any occasion in Islamic history.

Absolutely confident of the truth of God's promise, I state that the believers were never defeated in any engagement in their long history, and will never be defeated in the future, unless there is a flaw in their faith. This could be in thought or action. Part of true faith is to take careful precautions and to ensure proper preparedness to strive as hard as need be for God's cause and under His banner, with complete dedication. Temporary defeat will occur only in proportion to the flaw in the believers' faith. Victory will be sure to return when true faith returns.

If we take the example of the Battle of Uĥud, we find a gaping flaw manifesting itself in disobedience of the Prophet's orders and in yielding to the temptation of loot. In the Battle of Ĥunayn, the flaw was manifest in the Muslims' being proud of their numbers, feeling their own strength and forgetting the true source of power. If we study every occasion in Muslim history when victory was slow in coming, we will find a flaw in each case, which may or may not be readily identifiable. As for God's promise, it comes true at all times.

It is true that the believers may be subjected to a trial, but a trial has a definite purpose, which is to make them sure of true faith and to perfect it in their hearts so as to allow it to be reflected in their actions. This is what happened in Uĥud as related in *Sūrah* 3 (see Volume II, pp. 152-260). When the truth of faith has been tested and perfected, victory is certain to come; for God's promise never fails.

However, when I refer to defeat, I have in mind something much wider than the result of a battle. I am speaking of spiritual defeat and weakened resolve. Defeat in a military engagement should not be viewed as a complete defeat unless it leads to despair and inactivity. If, on the other hand, it awakens people, rekindles their resolve, helps them identify their likely slips and gives them a true vision of the nature of their faith and the battle they are fighting, then such a defeat should be viewed as the prelude to victory, even though it may be slow in coming.

"Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers." (Verse 141) When the Qur'ān makes this very clear, it emphasises that the believing spirit will always triumph and the ideology of faith will dominate. The Qur'ān calls upon the Muslims to perfect the truth of faith in their minds, giving it full practical effect in their lives. They must not rely totally on names and labels, because victory is never achieved by names hoisted high, but by the facts they represent. All that we need to ensure victory at any time or place is to ensure that faith is pure and complete in our hearts, and that it is put to practical effect in our lives. It is part of true faith to be prepared with every available means of strength and to seek our honour only through God.

This definite promise from God is in full agreement with the true nature of both faith and disbelief. Faith creates a strong bond with the absolute power in the universe, which will never weaken or disappear. Disbelief, on the other hand, means a break with that power and remaining isolated from it. It is not possible for a limited, isolated and exhaustible power to triumph over one that has a strong bond with the source of power throughout the universe.

However, we should make a clear distinction between the truth of faith and its appearances. The truth of faith is a real power as constant as all universal laws. It influences the human soul and all its actions and activities. It is a great, powerful truth, one which is certain to overcome the truth of disbelief whenever the two are in confrontation. But when faith is no more than an appearance, then the truth of disbelief will overcome it, if it is honest to its nature and works within its domain. The truth of anything is stronger than the appearance of anything else, even though the first is that of disbelief and the second is an appearance of faith.

The basic rule of the battle to overcome falsehood is to establish the truth. When the truth comes into being, with all its constituent elements and all its force, the result of the battle between it and falsehood is a foregone conclusion. Falsehood may appear to be awesome, extremely powerful, but all this is deceptive. *"We hurl the truth over falsehood, and it crushes the latter. Soon it withers away."* (21: 18) *"Never will God allow the unbelievers a way [to win a complete triumph] over the believers."* (Verse 141)

Whom Do They Deceive?

The *sūrah* moves on to paint another ugly picture of the hypocrites, adding further facts that show their designs to be hollow. It reiterates God's warnings to them: *"The hypocrites seek to deceive God, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom, wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor to those. For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way."* (Verses 142-143)

These verses again touch believing hearts, which will undoubtedly feel disgust with people who try to deceive God. A believer knows that God, limitless is He in His glory, cannot be deceived. How could that be possible when He knows the innermost secrets of people's hearts and what is even more deeply concealed. Believers realise that a person who tries to deceive God must have within him a great measure of evil, ignorance and naivety. Hence, they are disgusted with such people and look upon them with contempt.

The *sūrah* states that while they try to deceive God, it is indeed He who causes them to be deceived. He simply allows them to travel along their erring way, without alerting them by a calamity that opens their eyes. He leaves them to go along until

they fall into the abyss towards which they aim. Calamities and trials can often be an act of mercy, as they deter people from going further into error, or they alert them to what they have overlooked. Favours and affluence may also be a temptation for those who have been hardened in sin. As a result, they are left without any shock to wake them up to the realities of which they have become oblivious to. They continue in their sinning ways until they reach their most evil destination.

The *sūrah* continues to give images of the hypocrites which add to the believers' contempt: *"When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom."* (Verse 142) They are in no way eager to meet God as believers are, standing up in prayer, feeling close to God and deriving strength from Him. The hypocrites only rise to pray in order to be seen by people. Hence, they are very reluctant as they stand up. To them, prayer is a very hard job. It is not a means for God's remembrance. Indeed, they remember God only rarely. They remember people and try to be seen by them. All this adds up to a horrid picture in the eyes of the believers, increasing their feelings of disgust and contempt. This inevitably widens the gulf between them and the hypocrites, weakening personal and business ties between them. This forms an important stage in the Islamic system of educating the Muslim community, leading to a complete separation between the believers and the hypocrites.

Further lines are added to this ugly picture of the hypocrites, now shown to be *"wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor to those. For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way."* (Verse 143) A wavering, vacillating position without trying to commit oneself to either the camp of the believers or that of the unbelievers excites nothing among the believers but contempt. It suggests that the position of the hypocrites is inherently weak. It is their weakness that makes them unable to take a solid position, openly declaring themselves to belong to this side or that. They are too weak to declare a commitment on the basis of conviction. As a result of this shakiness they deserve not to be helped by God's guidance. Hence, no one is able to provide them with guidance showing them a straight way: *"For him whom God lets go astray you can never find any way."* (Verse 143)

Repentance Opens the Way

At this point when contempt of the hypocrites is at its strongest and believers' feelings of the hypocrites' weakness is at its highest, the believers are warned against taking the same way as the hypocrites. As we have explained, the way the hypocrites follow is that of taking the unbelievers for their allies in preference to the believers. They are warned against God's punishment, and shown the destiny of the hypocrites in the hereafter, which is both fearful and humiliating.

Believers! Do not take the unbelievers for your allies in preference to the believers. Do you want to place before God a manifest proof against yourselves? The hypocrites will be in the lowest depth of the fire, and you will find none who can give them support. Excepted shall be those who repent, live righteously, hold fast to God, and are more sincere in their faith in God. These shall be with the believers. God will in time grant a splendid reward for the believers. (Verses 144-146)

The *sūrah* again addresses the believers by the quality that distinguishes them from all other people and distinguishes their system, method and practices. This is the quality of faith, which makes them responsive, obeying God's orders. As believers, they are warned against following the ways of the hypocrites and against taking the unbelievers for allies. There must have been need in the Muslim community at the time for such an address. Relations were still maintained between some of the Muslims and the Jews in Madinah, or between some Muslims and their pagan relatives in Makkah, even though these may be no more than feelings of affinity. We say that this was the case among some Muslims, because there were others who severed all their relations with the unbelievers, including their parents and children. These followed God's instructions, making faith the only tie of social or family relations.

Those in the Muslim community who still maintained relations with unbelievers in Makkah or Madinah were the ones who needed this reminder that this could be the way to hypocrisy. This lesson is even more effective after the hypocrites have been depicted in their ugly, disgusting guise. Thus, the reminder serves as a warning against exposing themselves to God's punishment: *"Do you want to place before God a manifest proof against yourselves?"* (Verse 144) A believer's heart does not fear anything more than God's displeasure and His punishment. Hence, the warning is put in the form of a question, which is sufficient to have a telling effect on those who believe in God.

Then comes another loud knock to alert the believers' hearts. It is not aimed at them directly, but by implication. It comes in the form of a statement showing the hypocrites fearful and humiliating destiny: *"The hypocrites will be in the lowest depth of the fire, and you will find none who can give them support."* (Verse 145) They are indeed in the lowest depth, which befits their condition in this life, pulling them to the earth, making them stick to it, unable to elevate themselves in any way. That is the gravity of desire, temptation, caution, weakness and faint-heartedness. It is that which pulls them down until they reach a level where they take unbelievers for their allies while at the same time they try to win favour with the believers. That is how they justify their humiliating attitude: *"wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor to those"*. (Verse 143)

In life on earth, these people actually prepared themselves for their humiliating

destiny *"in the lowest depth of the fire";* where they could have no helpers or supporters. In this world, they befriended the unbelievers. How can the unbelievers give them support in the Hereafter?

Having painted this fearful scene, the *sūrah* opens for them the door to safety; that is the door of repentance which is open to anyone who wishes to ensure personal safety: *"Excepted shall be those who repent, live righteously, hold fast to God, and are more sincere in their faith in God. These shall be with the believers. God will in time grant a splendid reward for the believers."* (Verse 146) Elsewhere in the Qur'ān the exception is outlined for those *"who repent and live righteously."* Repentance and righteous living include, by necessity, seeking refuge with God and being sincere in one's faith in God. But these two qualities are specified in this instance because the reference here is to people who wavered, vacillated, resorted to hypocrisy and allied themselves with God's enemies. Hence, it is more fitting to add here, in the context of repentance and righteous living, a specific mention of dedication to God, seeking only His refuge and purging oneself of all wavering and vacillation. This demonstration by the repentant shows more strength and dedication.

That is how they are able then to elevate themselves to the ranks of the believers who seek honour with Him alone, feeling their elevation through faith, and, by the power of faith, rising high above earthly considerations. The reward reserved for the believers and those who join them is well known: *"God will in time grant a splendid reward for the believers."* (Verse 146)

With such varied touches the reality of the hypocrites in Islamic society and their weaknesses are exposed. The believers are warned against following this course of action, which will lead to the same fate. The door to repentance is open so that anyone who wishes to save himself is able to do so.

What Need for Punishment

Finally, we have a remarkable, inspiring and profoundly effective touch. It comes after mentioning terrible punishment and great, splendid reward, in order to make people realise that God has no need to punish anyone. All glory be to Him. He has no axe to grind and He bears no one any grudge. Nor does He need to demonstrate His power and authority in this way. He has no self- interest in inflicting torment on human beings. It is only in pagan legends that we encounter such claims: It is people themselves who receive all benefit when they believe and show their gratitude to God. Hence, they are shown the good prospects that encourage them to believe and be grateful. For God knows the inner thoughts of everyone and He always responds to good action: *"What can God gain by your punishment, if you are grateful and you believe? God is always responsive to gratitude, All-Knowing."* (Verse 147)

Yes, indeed! What would God do with people's punishment should they believe and be grateful? Punishment is only a requital for disbelief and ingratitude. It is also a threat so that people may take heed, accept the faith and demonstrate their gratitude. There is no desire here for inflicting punishment or torment, or for demonstrating power and authority. Far be it from God to entertain any such desire or feeling. It is merely a situation where people should seek protection through faith and gratitude, and then they will receive forgiveness and reward. Beyond that, God is ever responsive, well aware of what His servants feel.

God's response to gratitude has a profound effect on our hearts. It is well known that when God is thankful, then He is pleased with His servant, and His pleasure is given effect through a rich reward. But to say that God, in His glory, is grateful to His servants is profoundly inspiring. If God, the Creator, the Initiator who bestows endless favours and blessings on His creation — if He is grateful for His servants' faith, righteousness and gratitude when He needs nothing of all that, what should be their own attitude? If God Himself is thankful and grateful, what should His servants whom He has created and on whom He bestowed great favours do in return? This is a touch full of inspiration. When we hear it, our hearts tremble with shyness and response.

14
One Religion for All Mankind

God does not love evil to be spoken openly unless it be by someone who has been truly wronged. God hears all and knows all. (148)

۞ لَّا يُحِبُّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْجَهْرَ بِٱلسُّوٓءِ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَن ظُلِمَ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ سَمِيعًا عَلِيمًا ﴿١٤٨﴾

Whether you do good openly or in private, or pardon others for evil (done against you), God indeed absolves sin and He is Powerful. (149)

إِن تُبْدُوا۟ خَيْرًا أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ أَوْ تَعْفُوا۟ عَن سُوٓءٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوًّا قَدِيرًا ﴿١٤٩﴾

Those who deny God and His messengers, and want to make a distinction between [belief in] God and [belief in] His messengers, and say: "We believe in some but we deny others", and want to pursue a path in- between (150)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يُفَرِّقُوا۟ بَيْنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَّخِذُوا۟ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٥٠﴾

those, in truth, are unbelievers. We have prepared for unbelievers humiliating suffering. (151)

أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ حَقًّا ۚ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا ﴿١٥١﴾

As for those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them — to them He will give their reward. God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (152)

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُوا۟ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٥٢﴾

يَسْـَٔلُكَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ أَن تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ
كِتَـٰبًا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ ۚ فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا۟ مُوسَىٰٓ أَكْبَرَ
مِن ذَٰلِكَ فَقَالُوٓا۟ أَرِنَا ٱللَّهَ جَهْرَةً
فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ ٱلصَّـٰعِقَةُ بِظُلْمِهِمْ ۚ ثُمَّ ٱتَّخَذُوا۟
ٱلْعِجْلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ
فَعَفَوْنَا عَن ذَٰلِكَ ۚ وَءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ سُلْطَـٰنًا
مُّبِينًا ﴿١٥٣﴾

The people of earlier revelations ask you to have a book sent down to them from heaven. They asked Moses for something even greater than that, when they said: "Make us see God with our own eyes". The thunderbolt smote them for this their wrongdoing. After that, they took to worshipping the calf, even after clear evidence of the truth had come to them. Yet We pardoned them that, and We gave Moses clear authority. (153)

وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَهُمُ ٱلطُّورَ بِمِيثَـٰقِهِمْ وَقُلْنَا
لَهُمُ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ لَا
تَعْدُوا۟ فِى ٱلسَّبْتِ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُم مِّيثَـٰقًا
غَلِيظًا ﴿١٥٤﴾

We raised Mount Sinai high above them in witness of their solemn pledge. And We said to them: "Enter the gate, prostrating yourselves"; and We also told them: "Do not break the Sabbath-law"; and We received from them a most solemn pledge. (154)

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِم مِّيثَـٰقَهُمْ وَكُفْرِهِم بِـَٔايَـٰتِ
ٱللَّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ ٱلْأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ
قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌۢ ۚ بَلْ طَبَعَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ
فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٥٥﴾

And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, their disbelief in God's revelations, their killing of prophets against all right, and for their boast, "Our hearts are closed." Indeed God sealed their hearts on account of their disbelief. As a result they have no faith except for a few of them. (155)

وَبِكُفْرِهِمْ وَقَوْلِهِمْ عَلَىٰ مَرْيَمَ بُهْتَـٰنًا
عَظِيمًا ﴿١٥٦﴾

And for their disbelief and the monstrous calumny they utter against Mary, (156)

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا ٱلْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ٱبْنَ
مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ
وَلَـٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ
لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ ۚ مَا لَهُم بِهِۦ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا
ٱتِّبَاعَ ٱلظَّنِّ ۚ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًۢا ﴿١٥٧﴾

and their boast: "We have killed the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, God's Messenger." They did not kill him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so. Those who hold conflicting views about him are indeed confused, having no real knowledge about it, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not kill him.

(157)

بَل رَّفَعَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيۡهِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمٗا ١٥٨

No! God raised him up to Himself. God is indeed Almighty, Wise. (158)

وَإِن مِّنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا لَيُؤۡمِنَنَّ بِهِۦ قَبۡلَ مَوۡتِهِۦۖ وَيَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ شَهِيدٗا ١٥٩

There is not one of the people of earlier revelations but will, at the moment of his death, believe in him, and on the Day of Resurrection he will bear witness to the truth against them. (159)

فَبِظُلۡمٖ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ حَرَّمۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ طَيِّبَٰتٍ أُحِلَّتۡ لَهُمۡ وَبِصَدِّهِمۡ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَثِيرٗا ١٦٠

So, then, for the wrongdoing of the Jews did We forbid them some of the good things of life which had been formerly allowed to them; and, indeed for their turning away often from God's path, (160)

وَأَخۡذِهِمُ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ وَقَدۡ نُهُواْ عَنۡهُ وَأَكۡلِهِمۡ أَمۡوَٰلَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلۡبَٰطِلِۚ وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ مِنۡهُمۡ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ١٦١

and for their taking usury although it had been forbidden to them, and their wrongful devouring of other people's property. We have prepared for the unbelievers among them grievous suffering. (161)

لَّٰكِنِ ٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِي ٱلۡعِلۡمِ مِنۡهُمۡ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ مِن قَبۡلِكَۚ وَٱلۡمُقِيمِينَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَۚ وَٱلۡمُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ سَنُؤۡتِيهِمۡ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمًا ١٦٢

Yet those of them who are versed in knowledge, and the believers, do believe in what is bestowed upon you from on high and that which was bestowed from on high before you. These are the ones who attend to their prayers and spend in charity, and who believe in God and the Last Day. To these We shall give a great reward. (162)

۞ إِنَّآ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ كَمَآ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ نُوحٖ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦۚ وَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَ وَٱلۡأَسۡبَاطِ وَعِيسَىٰ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَٰرُونَ وَسُلَيۡمَٰنَۚ وَءَاتَيۡنَا دَاوُۥدَ زَبُورٗا

We have sent revelations to you just as We did send revelations to Noah and the prophets after him; as We sent revelations to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and as We vouchsafed to

﴿١٦٣﴾

David a Book of Divine wisdom, (163)

وَرُسُلًا قَدْ قَصَصْنَٰهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ
وَرُسُلًا لَّمْ نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ ۚ وَكَلَّمَ ٱللَّهُ
مُوسَىٰ تَكْلِيمًا ﴿١٦٤﴾

and as [We inspired other] messengers whom We have mentioned to you previously, as well as other messengers whom We have not mentioned to you. And God has spoken His word directly to Moses. (164)

رُّسُلًا مُّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ
لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ حُجَّةٌۢ بَعْدَ ٱلرُّسُلِ ۚ وَكَانَ
ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٦٥﴾

[These] were messengers sent to bring good news and to give warning, so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers (had come). God is Almighty, Wise. (165)

لَّٰكِنِ ٱللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ إِلَيْكَ ۖ أَنزَلَهُۥ
بِعِلْمِهِۦ ۖ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ
شَهِيدًا ﴿١٦٦﴾

However it be, God [Himself] bears witness to the truth of what He has bestowed from on high to you: with His knowledge He bestowed it from on high; and the angels also bear witness to that; although God is sufficient as a witness. (166)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَصَدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
قَدْ ضَلُّوا۟ ضَلَٰلًۢا بَعِيدًا ﴿١٦٧﴾

Those who disbelieve and debar others from the way of God have indeed gone far astray. (167)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَظَلَمُوا۟ لَمْ يَكُنِ ٱللَّهُ
لِيَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ وَلَا لِيَهْدِيَهُمْ طَرِيقًا ﴿١٦٨﴾

Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, (168)

إِلَّا طَرِيقَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۚ وَكَانَ
ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ﴿١٦٩﴾

except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. That is indeed easy for God. (169)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدْ جَآءَكُمُ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِٱلْحَقِّ
مِن رَّبِّكُمْ فَـَٔامِنُوا۟ خَيْرًا لَّكُمْ ۚ وَإِن تَكْفُرُوا۟
فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ

Mankind, the messenger has now come to you with the truth from your Lord. Believe, then, for it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all

that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (170)	ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٧٠﴾

Overview

As the Qur'ān was being revealed, it undertook the process of establishing a new nation out of a great many scattered groups each steeped in their little corners of ignorance. After Islam remoulded their characters, the Muslims were led by the hand to a much higher human standard. They were then assigned their great role as the leaders of mankind. In this way, Islam set a completely new moral standard for its followers, one based on a clear conscience and a pure social set-up.

Once the new Muslim community had attained this standard, its superiority over the rest of mankind in personal and social morality was equal to its superiority in ideological concepts. The Muslim community was then able to accomplish, by God's will, what He had determined for it, and to assume its role as custodian of the Divine system. It, thus, became a guide for mankind bringing them out of darkness into light, and providing them with an honest and caring leadership.

Superiority of moral standards makes a nation naturally fit for the role of leadership. It provides the right foundation enabling that nation to achieve a higher standard of civilisation and scientific advancement and to formulate a better economic and political system. Superiority in these matters comes as a natural result of superior beliefs and moral values. This is part of God's natural law which applies to individuals and communities alike.

No Foul Language

Part of this conscience purification process on individual and social levels is represented by the two opening verses in the present passage: *"God does not love evil to be spoken openly unless it be by someone who has been truly wronged. God hears all and knows all. Whether you do good openly or in private, or pardon others for evil (done against you), God indeed absolves sin and He is Powerful."* (Verses 148-149)

By virtue of its sensitivity, society needs to establish a proper standard of social morality. A word said unwittingly and a rumour intended against only one person may have highly detrimental effects on society as a whole, its traditions, and values. Unless checked by conscience and by the quality common to believers, namely, fear of God, it is very easy to use evil language, which inevitably leaves profoundly harmful effects on society. It often destroys mutual confidence among people, giving a general impression that evil has become commonplace. It also encourages those

with evil tendencies to bring them out into the open. Since they are not the first to start evil, it already being widespread, they need not worry about any reaction. Moreover, familiarity removes the initial shock effect of evil. People tend not to express their disgust at hearing evil words, or indeed, seeing evil acts, when these become widespread. No one will try to change an evil when it becomes commonplace.

Additionally, those who are accused of evil and around whom false rumours are spread actually suffer injustice. This is a direct result of the evil language being used. Innocent people are grouped together with those who are guilty, accusations fly around, psychological and social considerations, which restrain people from using foul language and prevent evil action, become ineffective.

The fact is that the use of evil words starts in the form of individual accusations, but it leads to social corruption and moral chaos. No individual or group of people are given their due credit and people have no confidence in each other, when baseless accusations circulate and scruples are totally disregarded. For these reasons, God does not like the Muslim community to allow evil words to become common parlance. The only exemption in this regard is given to the one who suffers injustice. He is allowed to repel this with a foul word with which he describes the person who has wronged him, within the context of what he has suffered: *"God does not love evil to be spoken openly unless it be by someone who has been truly wronged."* (Verse 148)

In this case, speaking ill of someone, including using language which may be libellous, is no more than an attempt to remove the injustice and retaliation against some wrong that has been done to a particular person. It is no more than a denunciation of injustice and the wrongdoer, which allows the community to punish the latter and restore justice. This works as a deterrent against this sort of action so that it is not repeated either by the same person or others. It should be pointed out here, that those evil words which are allowed to be spoken openly originate with a particular person, who has been wronged, for a particular reason, and are levelled at one person in particular, the wrongdoer. The end purpose justifies the exemption given in this verse, namely, to restore justice to a person who has been wronged. To be sure, Islam does not allow libel in any form. It protects people's reputation and integrity as long as they do not wrong others. If they do so, however, they relinquish their rights of protection.

By enabling this exemption, Islam maintains a balance between its two desires, to maintain a high standard of justice which admits no breach and a standard of morality which allows no violation of personal or social propriety. Commenting on the prohibition and the exemption, the Qur'ān states: *"God hears all and knows all."* (Verse 148) The conclusion relates the whole matter to God's law, after it has been given at the outset within the context of what God loves and what He dislikes: *"God does not love evil to be spoken openly."* The comment at the end of the verse emphasises that judgement of motive and intention, as well as the truth of the words uttered and the accusation so expressed is made by God who hears whatever is said and knows what is in people's hearts.

The *sūrah* does not stop at giving an order not to speak evil openly; it encourages the positive aspect of doing good generally and pardoning others for any error. It reminds people that God Himself is Much- Forgiving, Most Lenient, when He is able to punish offenders. This reminder also serves as an incentive to believers to follow, within the limits of their ability, God's example in dealing with people: *"Whether you do good openly or in private, or pardon others for evil (done against you), God indeed absolves sin and He is Powerful."* (Verse 149)

Here, Islam takes its followers, individuals and communities, up through another stage of their educational process, all the while refining their characters. In the first stage, it spoke to them about God's dislike of evil being spoken openly. It provided a concession to someone subjected to injustice to speak against the person who had wronged him, this so as to remove that wrong. In this second stage, it raises them all to the level of doing good. As for the individual who has been wronged, he is encouraged to freely pardon and forgive, even though he is legitimately able to retaliate in order to remove the injustice.

Needless to say, such forgiveness is higher and more becoming of believers than retaliation. All this helps the spread of good in the Muslim community if it is done openly. If it is done in secret, it helps keep hearts and souls pure. Good is beneficial when done in public or in private. When forgiveness becomes commonplace, little room is left for evil words said in public. The only condition is that forgiveness be granted even when one feels able to retaliate. We forgive because we like to be forgiven by God who, though, able to punish us, pardons us: *"God indeed absolves sin and He is Powerful."* (Verse 149)

Deny One Part, Deny All

The *sūrah* then moves on to speak about those people who received revelations from God prior to the advent of Islam. It then speaks about the Jews in particular and, at a later stage, about the Christians. It is well known that the Jews speak openly in evil terms about Mary and Jesus. They have no basis whatsoever for what they say against them. It is all their own fabrication. Their evil accusations are mentioned in this passage which links it to the two preceding verses in which God orders believers not to speak evil openly. The whole passage is part of the campaign conducted by the Qur'ān against the enemies of the Muslim community in Madinah. Similar parts of this campaign were given in this *sūrah* and the two preceding it. We will now discuss this campaign as it unfolds in this *sūrah.*

> *Those who deny God and His messengers, and want to make a distinction between [belief in] God and [belief in] His messengers, and say: "We believe in some but we deny others", and want to pursue a path in-between those, in truth, are unbelievers. We have prepared for unbelievers humiliating suffering. As for those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them — to them He*

will give their reward. God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (Verses 150-152)

The Jews claimed that they believed in their prophets, but they denied the messages of Jesus and Muĥammad (peace be upon them). The Christians, on the other hand, believed in earlier prophets but stopped at Jesus, though they gave him a Divine nature. They, however, also denied the message of Muĥammad (peace be upon him). The Qur'ān denounces both groups, and explains that the proper and comprehensive concept of faith is based on believing in God and His Messenger, making no distinction between God on the one hand and His messengers on the other, or between the messengers themselves. Embracing such a wide view, Islam is then the only religion acceptable to God, because it emphasises the oneness of God and its practical effects on people's lives and beliefs.

Believing in the absolute unity of God necessitates that we believe that the religion His messengers preached to mankind is also a single faith, and that His messengers who have been entrusted with conveying it to mankind belong to one group. Any denial of the unity of messengers or that the message itself is a single message, is a denial of the oneness of God and a misconception of what His oneness means. The religion and the code God has given to mankind come from the same source and share the same basis and essence. For this reason, those who wish to make a distinction between God and His messengers so that they profess to believe in God and deny His messengers and those who want to make a distinction between some messengers and others, believing in the former and denying the latter, are described as ones "*who deny God and His messengers*". The two distinctions they want to draw represent a denial of them all.

Faith is one complete whole that cannot be divided into parts. To believe in God means to accept that He is One, which, by necessity, means that the religion and the constitution which He has devised to serve as a basis on which all human life is built is also a single religion. It implies that the messengers who have preached this religion in accordance with God's will and His revelations are also a single unity. Attitudes to them all must be the same. Only through absolute disbelief can this unity be dismantled, although people may claim that they believe in some messengers and deny others. The only reward for them is that God has prepared humiliating suffering for them all: "*Those, in truth, are unbelievers. We have prepared for unbelievers humiliating suffering.*" (Verse 151)

Muslims, on the other hand, are those whose ideological concepts require them to believe in God and all His messengers without any distinction. All messengers are highly respected by them, and all Divine faiths are true, unless distortion has crept into them. In this case, they are no longer Divine, in spite of the fact that parts of them may be still maintained in their original forms. Faith is a single unity derived

from the fact that there is only one God. It is He who has devised for human beings a single faith and a single system and He who has sent His messengers to explain them to people. To a Muslim, the procession of believers is ever-continuing, led by Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muĥammad and all the other messengers, (peace be upon them all). Their own affiliation to this procession is very genuine indeed, since they are the custodians of this great task and the heirs to an ever- continuing blessing. There can be no distinction, no isolation and no splitting asunder. True faith is a complete whole. They alone have inherited the religion of the truth, beyond which lie only falsehood and error. This is the definition of the religion of Islam, which is the only faith acceptable to God. Such are the Muslims who deserve to be rewarded by God for their deeds, and deserve to be forgiven for what they may have omitted: *"To them, He will give their reward. God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful.''* (Verse 152)

Islam takes such a strict view on the question of the unity of faith in God and His messengers because it is the proper foundation on which a believer builds his concept of his Lord, and the well regulated universe where no clash or conflict takes place. It is the faith worthy of a man who recognises the same law of creation throughout the universe and which groups the believers together in one rank opposed to all groups of unbelievers. That rank, however, does not admit those who have distorted faiths, though they may have Divine origins. It admits only those who advocate the proper, pure, undistorted faith.

On this basis, Islam is the only true faith and the Muslims are "the best community ever raised for mankind". This description, however, applies only to those Muslims who have a proper and pure faith which they implement. It does not apply to everyone born into a Muslim family or to anyone who just pays lip-service to Islam.

In this light, those who try to draw a distinction between God and His messengers, or between some messengers and others appear to stand far away from the rank of believers. They seem to try to break the unity brought about by God and seem to deny the concept of Oneness upon which belief in God is founded.

The Hard-Hearted Nature of the Israelites

Having established this basic principle of Islamic faith with regard to the truth of faith and unfaith, God's messengers and their messages, the *sūrah* now refers to the attitudes adopted by the Jews on a number of occasions and how they openly spoke evil. It denounces their attitude towards the Prophet and his message, particularly their pigheaded demands asking him to provide them with signs and evidence proving his message. It compares this attitude to the one they adopted towards their own messenger, Moses (peace be upon him), and to their attitude towards Jesus

(peace be upon him) and his mother, Mary. Their stance reveals that the Jews have always had the same nature over many generations. The Qur'ān speaks of the Jewish generation which opposed the Prophet and that which opposed Jesus and the one which opposed Moses in the past as one group, in this way emphasising the fact that they all shared the same nature.

> *The people of earlier revelations ask you to have a book sent down to them from heaven. They asked Moses for something even greater than that, when they said: `Make us see God with our own eyes." The thunderbolt smote them for this their wrongdoing. After that, they took to worshipping the calf even after clear evidence of the truth had come to them. Yet We pardoned them that, and We gave Moses clear authority. We raised Mount Sinai high above them in witness of their solemn pledge. And We said to them: `Enter the gate, prostrating yourselves"; and We also told them: `Do not break the Sabbath-law"; and We received from them a most solemn pledge.* (Verses 153-154)

The Jews living in the Arabian Peninsula took an openly hostile and rigid attitude towards Islam and the Prophet. They continuously schemed against Islam to try to bring about its downfall. Their attitude and scheming have been described in detail in the Qur'ān. We have also discussed certain aspects of it in Volumes I and II as also earlier in this volume. Now we have an explanation of other aspects of this attitude.

Adopting an overbearing manner, they demanded of the Prophet that he should bring them a written book sent down from heaven which they could touch with their own hands: *"The people of earlier revelations ask you to have a book sent down to them from heaven."* (Verse 153)

God gives the answer on behalf of His Messenger, relating to him and to the Muslim community a chapter of Jewish history with their own Prophet, leader, and saviour, Moses, in whom they claimed to believe while denying the messages of Jesus and Muĥammad (peace be upon them all). This arrogance, then is not new. It was not characteristic only of that generation of Jews. Ever since the time of Moses, they have demonstrated their insensitivity, which has restricted their understanding to the material world only, and their stubbornness which has shown that they do not yield to the truth except under pressure. They have always been treacherous, breaking their covenants not only with people but also with their Lord. They are rude and impudent: they do not verify what is being said. Nor do they refrain from using evil words. They are always greedy, trying to lay their hands on other people's property though they may have no rightful claim to it. They turn their backs on God and the reward He has in store for believers.

What we have here, then, is a campaign revealing the true nature of the Jews and their attitudes. The fact that it tackles in such a powerful way so many different

aspects shows us just what the situation in Madinah at the time of the Prophet really was like. The same sort of wicked scheming is still going on against Islam and the Muslims to this day.

"The people of earlier revelations ask you to have a book sent down to them from heaven." You need not worry about this rigidity in which there is nothing new: *"They asked Moses for something even greater than that, when they said: Make us see God with our own eyes.'"*

The clear evidence and clear signs God has given them through Moses, their Prophet, were not enough to touch their hearts and open their minds or to lead them to belief and submission. They wanted to see God directly, with their own eyes. This was a demand characterised by rudeness which could not have come from a person who knows or feels what faith means. Therefore, *"the thunderbolt smote them for their wrongdoing".* (Verse 153) God, however, pardoned them, this in answer to the prayers of Moses who appealed to God to forgive them. This is explained in another *sūrah: "When violent trembling seized them, he (Moses) prayed: My Lord, had You so willed, You would have destroyed them before this, and me with them. Will You destroy us for what the weak-minded among us have done? All this is but a trial from You, whereby You allow to go astray whom You will and guide aright whom You will. You are Our Master: grant us then, forgiveness and have mercy on us. You are the best of all forgivers."* (7: 155)

"After that, they took to worshipping the calf even after clear evidence of the truth had come to them." The reference here is to the golden calf, made for them by the Sāmirī using the jewellery taken by trickery from Egyptian women as they left Egypt. They immediately took to worshipping that calf when Moses was called away from them, staying at a place appointed to him by His Lord where He gave him the tablets containing guidance for his people.

"Yet We pardoned them that." But the Jews are always the same. They succumb by force only. "*And We gave Moses clear authority."* (Verse 153) That authority is most probably the laws contained in the tablets. A law given by God provides direct authority from Him. God does not sanction any law other than that. It has no real effect on people's hearts. Consequently, people do not show proper respect to laws and regulations that they themselves issue or promulgate. These are only heeded when people fear being caught when they break them. God's laws, on the other hand, enjoy genuine respect and people observe them willingly.

> *We raised Mount Sinai high above them in witness of their solemn pledge. And We said to them: `Enter the gate, prostrating yourselves"; and We also told them: "Do not break the Sabbath-law"; and We received Pam them a most solemn pledge.* (Verse 154)

Because their hearts had not been truly influenced by faith, the Jews refused to submit to what was written on the tablets. Hence, they were brought into submission by the sort of physical force suited to their insensitive nature. They beheld the mountain raised above their heads, threatening to fall down any moment and destroy them all unless they surrendered and pledged to observe the covenant God made with them and to carry out their duties as explained on these tablets. Only then, when they were forced into submission did they give their pledges to fulfil the binding, most emphatic covenant. The covenant is described here in terms fitting the horrific image of a mountain raised over their heads and within their hardened hearts. Describing the covenant thus also provides an image of its power and effect.

The covenant stipulated that they should prostrate themselves when they entered the gate of Jerusalem, and that they should observe the Sabbath law, after having requested that the Sabbath be their day of rest and enjoyment. But what happened thereafter? Once their feelings of fear and of being overpowered had weakened, they began to disassociate themselves from their pledges. They denied God's revelations and killed their prophets without having any cause to do so. Moreover, they boasted arrogantly, saying that their hearts were closed to all words of admonition. Furthermore, they did all the things God relates to His Messenger and to the Muslims in the Qur'ān: *"And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, their disbelief in God's revelations, their killing of prophets against all right, and for their boast, "Our hearts are closed." Indeed God sealed their hearts on account of their disbelief. As a result they have no faith except for a few of them."* (Verse 155)

At this point the account of their highly objectionable behaviour is interrupted. They would say: *"Our hearts are closed"*, either to make the Prophet despair of a favourable response from them or to deride the fact that they, themselves, were being called upon to believe in Islam. An answer is given straight away to silence them: *"Indeed God sealed their hearts on account of their disbelief As a result they have no faith, except for a few of them."* (Verse 155) Their hearts were not sealed by nature. It is their disbelief and their rejection of God's messages which caused them to be stamped over and sealed by God. Thus, they are hard-hearted, misguided, incapable of appreciating what faith means. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of them remained unbelievers. Only a few kept their hearts open, maintained an objective judgement and pursued the truth wherever it led them. God has guided these people aright and they accepted the faith. But these were very few indeed. Among them were `Abdullāh ibn Sallām, Tha`labah ibn Sa`yah, Asad ibn Sa`yah and Asad ibn `Ubaydillāh.

The Truth About the Crucifixion

Having answered this boastful claim, the *sūrah* resumes outlining the causes behind their being forbidden certain things which they were previously permitted and the preparation of an even more humiliating punishment for them in the hereafter: "*And for their disbelief and the monstrous calumny they utter against Mary, and their boast: 'We have killed the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, God's Messenger.'*" (Verses 156-57)

The fact of their being unbelievers is referred to every time one of their evil actions is mentioned. This has already been stated in conjunction with their killing of prophets against all right. Needless to say, no prophet could ever be killed rightly. It is merely a statement of fact that the killing of prophets is described as absolutely wrongful and unjust. Again, they are described as unbelievers in conjunction with the monstrous falsehood that they circulated against Mary. Essentially, they accused Mary, the pure, of adultery with Joseph the Carpenter. Accursed are they. They then boasted that they killed the Messiah and crucified him. They coupled this with derision at his statement that he was God's Messenger.

At this point, the account is interrupted again in order to answer this claim by the Jews and to establish the truth concerning Jesus: "*They did not kill him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so. Those who hold conflicting views about him are indeed confused, having no real knowledge about it, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not kill him. No! God raised him up to Himself. God is indeed Almighty, Wise.*" (Verses 157-158)

As regards whether Jesus was killed or crucified, the Jews and the Christians make false claims which have no basis other than in their own suspicions. The Jews claim to have killed him, ridiculing his assertion that he was God's Messenger. The Christians, on the other hand, claim that he was crucified and buried. But they also claim that he was raised three days later. As for history, it states nothing about Christ's birth or his end, almost as if nothing happened. When they make their statements, neither the Jews nor the Christians are certain of their truthfulness. Events moved fast, and conflicting reports were made and muddled up. The real truth could not be discovered, except through Divine guidance.

The four Gospels which relate the story of the arrest, crucifixion, death, burial, and rise of Jesus Christ were all written after a lengthy lapse of time which also witnessed the persecution of Christianity and the Christians. In such an atmosphere of secrecy, fear and persecution, it is exceedingly difficult to be certain of the truthfulness of the reports that circulated. Many other Gospels were written during this period, but these four were chosen towards the end of the second century and were given official status for reasons that are not entirely above suspicion.

One of the many Gospels written in this period was that of Barnabas which gives

an account of the story and crucifixion of Jesus that is at variance with the four recognised Gospels. It states: "When the soldiers, and Judas with them drew near to the place where Jesus was, he heard a large number of people coming close. In fear, he retreated to the home where all eleven disciples were asleep. When the Lord saw His servant in danger, He ordered Gabriel, Michael, Rafael and Oriel, His messengers, to take Jesus away from this world. The pure angels came down and carried Jesus through the window facing south and placed him in the third heaven in the company of angels who glorified the Lord forever. Judas entered violently the room from which Jesus was raised. All the disciples were still asleep. At that moment, God the Almighty accomplished a miraculous thing. Judas's face and voice changed so that he looked like Jesus. We all thought that he was Jesus indeed. As for him, after he awakened us, he began to search for the teacher. We were surprised and said: You are our master and teacher. Have you forgotten us?"

A scholar sifting his material carefully cannot find any confirmed account of this remarkable event that took place in the depths of the night, before the break of dawn. Hence, no report can be given more credence than another. *"Those who hold conflicting views about him are indeed confused, having no real knowledge about it, and following mere conjecture."* (Verse 157) The Qur'ān, on the other hand, gives its clear account: *"They did not kill him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so."* (Verse 157) ... *"For, of a certainty, they did not kill him. No! God raised him up to Himself. God is indeed Almighty, Wise."* (Verses 157-158) The Qur'ān does not give any details concerning how Jesus was raised or whether it took place in body and soul together in this state of life, or in soul after death. Nor does it tell us when and where his death took place, if at all. What we know for certain is that they neither killed nor crucified him. Instead, another victim was made to appear similar to him.

This is the only statement of fact the Qur'ān makes, apart from what it mentions elsewhere quoting God's address to Jesus: *"Jesus, I shall gather you and cause you to ascend to Me."* (3: 55) In neither statement do we have any details about how Jesus was gathered or the nature of this gathering. For our part, we do not like to change the method we have followed so far when considering statements and legends which we have no way of proving or disproving.

Actions Meriting Punishment

The Qur'ānic text has still more to say about Christ, the position of the people of earlier revelations towards him and what they believed about him: *"There is not one of the people of earlier revelations but will, at the moment of his death, believe in him, and on the Day of Resurrection he will bear witness to the truth against them."* (Verse 159)

Early Muslim scholars interpret this verse in different ways, according to the

referent, in their view, of the pronoun in the phrase *"his death"*. Some maintain that every single person of the people of earlier revelations will inevitably believe in Jesus before his, i.e. Jesus's death, considering that he will be back on earth before the Day of Resurrection. Other scholars maintain that every single one of the people of earlier revelations will, before his own death, believe in Jesus. This means that when this person is in the throes of death, he will be made to see the truth, when his own knowledge will no longer avail him. We are more inclined to take this second view. It means that the Jews who have denied Jesus and continued to deny his status, claiming to have killed and crucified him, will have this experience which tells them that Jesus was truly a messenger from God and that his message was the truth. They will then believe in Jesus but it will be too late for their belief to be of any benefit to them. On the Day of Resurrection, Jesus will be a witness against them.

Having established the truth about the alleged crucifixion, the *sūrah* resumes its account of the evil deeds perpetrated by the Jews, the punishment they have endured in this life and that which they will endure in the life to come: *"So, then, for their wrongdoing of the Jews did We forbid them some of the good things of life which had been formerly allowed to them; and, indeed for their turning away often from God's path, and for their taking usury although it had been forbidden to them, and their wrongful devouring of other people's property. We have prepared for the unbelievers among them grievous suffering."* (Verse 160-161)

This statement adds to the list of evil deeds perpetrated by the Jews some very serious ones which were not mentioned earlier. This includes wrongdoing, turning away from God's path, which they do all the time, and their accepting usury, not because of lack of knowledge, for they have been forbidden all forms of usury, but because they pay no heed to the instruction. The list also includes the fact that they devour other people's property wrongfully, through usury and other methods. For all these wrong deeds and the others mentioned earlier, many of the good things of this world, which they have been permitted to enjoy, have subsequently been forbidden them. God has also prepared grievous suffering for those who disbelieve.

Thus, the nature of the Jews and their history is revealed. Their thinly disguised excuses for not responding favourably to the Prophet are laid bare. If they were stubborn with the Prophet, they had been stiff and stubborn with their own Prophet, leader and saviour. It is so easy for them to violate God's laws and to speak ill of prophets and righteous people and indeed to kill them and boast about their crimes. By bringing all this into the open, the Qur'ān renders futile all their schemes and plotting against the Muslims. The Muslim community learns about the nature of the Jews, their methods and their opposition to the truth whether its advocates are people from among them or from other nations. In all generations and with their friends and enemies alike, they oppose the truth and its followers just as they oppose

Divine guidance and its advocates. Their hearts are hardened and they do not submit to the power of the truth unless the sword is held over their heads.

It was not only for the benefit of the first Muslim community in Madinah that the nature of this type of people was exposed. The Qur'ān is the book of the Muslim community, serving as its source of guidance for the rest of time. When this nation refers to the Qur'ān for advice and guidance about its enemies, it will certainly provide that. It has given the Muslim community the advice and guidance it needs concerning the Jews. Therefore, the Muslim community was able to bring them to submission. But when the Muslims abandoned the Qur'ān, they had to submit to the Jews. We have seen them gather together only to be defeated by a small force of Jews, simply because they neglected their book of guidance, the Qur'ān, preferring to follow different doctrines and creeds. They will continue to submit to the Jews and suffer from their scheming until they turn back to the Qur'ān.

The *sūrah,* however, does not neglect to give credit to those few Jews who believe and submit to the truth. It includes these among believers, states that they will be well rewarded, and testifies to their being well versed in knowledge. It states that it is their profound knowledge that led them to believe in the Divine faith as a whole, including what was revealed to the Prophet and what was revealed before him: *"Yet those of them who are versed in knowledge, and the believers, do believe in what is bestowed upon you from on high and that which was bestowed from on high before you. These are the ones who attend to their prayers and spend in charity, and who believe in God and the Last Day. To these We shall give a great reward."* (Verse 162)

Firm knowledge and enlightened belief lead people to accepting faith in its entirety. They also lead to the acknowledgement that Divine faith, revealed by God, the only deity in the Universe, is essentially a single faith.

This firm and proper knowledge is described as a way leading to the truth, just the same as a belief which opens hearts to light is a most appropriate description of the relationship between knowledge and faith. Superficial knowledge and arrogant denial of the truth are the two factors that prevent a human being from learning the truth. This is true of all generations. Those who acquire profound knowledge and become well versed in it find themselves face to face with signs and phenomena all over the universe leading them to faith. Or, at least, they have in front of them many a question about the universe which can only be answered through believing that there is a single Deity who has created the universe and conducts all its affairs and who has a consistent will which has established a single and constant law for the universe. Similarly, those who genuinely aspire to receive guidance, i.e. believers, will undoubtedly have it.

On the other hand, those who receive scant knowledge, yet think themselves to be

great scholars, are the ones whose lack of information prevents them from identifying the signs and indicators which lead to faith. These do not see any question marks that can only be answered through faith. They are in the same position as those whose hearts do not aspire to receive guidance. Therefore, neither of these types of people feel the need for reassurance generated by faith. Some of them equate being religious with ignorant fanaticism, making distinctions between the Divine religions which have been revealed by the same Deity through a long procession of noble messengers (peace be upon them all).

Commentators on the Qur'ān mention that this verse refers in the first place to those Jews whom we have named above and who responded to the Prophet's call and accepted Islam. It applies, however, to every one of them who accepts the guidance represented by this religion of Islam, whether motivated by profound knowledge or enlightened faith. The *sūrah* includes these with the believers who are identified here as those who *"attend to their prayers and spend in charity and who believe in God and the Last Day"*. These are qualities which distinguish true Muslims. All such people have their reward in store for them with God: *"To these We shall give a great reward."*

Finally, we should perhaps mention that the description of those believers as those *"who attend to their prayers"* is stated, from the linguistic point of view, in the objective case while all others are subjective in their case marking. According to the rules of Arabic grammar, it should normally have been stated in the subjective case, like the rest. However, the change denotes stronger emphasis as it signifies those "who particularly attend to their prayers". This mode of expression is not uncommon in Arabic.

The Purpose of Sending Messengers

The *sūrah* continues its confrontation with the people of earlier revelations, particularly the Jews in this instance, condemning their attitude, particularly their rejection of the Prophet Muĥammad's message and their false claim that God did not send him as a Messenger. It refers to the distinction they tried to draw between messengers and their arrogant demands for proof of this message in the form of a book sent to him, Muĥammad, from heaven. This *sūrah* states clearly that revelation to a messenger is not something new or strange. Indeed, it is the normal practice with all messengers since the time of Noah to that of Muĥammad. All of them have been sent as messengers bringing happy news and delivering strong warnings. This is an aspect of Divine mercy bestowed by God on His servants that they may have no argument to justify their disbelief. They have been amply warned before the Day of Judgement. All these messengers were sent for the same aim, and to convey the same

message. Hence, to try to distinguish between them is an attitude smacking of arrogance and conceit. If people deny this fact, God bears witness to it, together with the angels. God is sufficient for a witness.

> *We have sent revelations to you just as We did send revelations to Noah and the prophets after him; as We sent revelations to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and as We vouchsafed to David a book of Divine wisdom; and as [We inspired other] messengers whom We have mentioned to you previously, as well as other messengers whom We have not mentioned to you. And God has spoken His word directly to Moses. [These] were messengers sent to bring good news and to give warning, so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers (had come). God is Almighty, Wise.* (Verses 163-165)

It is then the same procession moving forward throughout human history, conveying a single message, bringing the same guidance to warn and to give a piece of happy news. It includes a group of chosen men like Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, David, Moses, as well as others whom God spoke about to His Messenger in the Qur'ān and still others about whom He told the Prophet nothing. It is a procession which includes people from various nations and various countries, living at different times. Nothing gives any of them distinction over others. No consideration of race, nation, place, or time divides them. They all give the same guiding light, to warn and motivate, and they all try to lead human beings towards the light. This applies to those of them who were sent to a particular tribe, community, nation, city, country, or the one who was sent to all mankind, namely, Muĥammad, the last of all messengers.

Every one of them received revelations from God. None of them invented anything of his own accord. If Moses was spoken to directly by God, this was simply one aspect of revelation and none of us knows how it happened. The Qur'ān, which is the only authentic source we have on such matters, has not given us any details. The only thing we know is that God gave this revelation in words. How and in what manner or in what sense or power Moses used to receive it we do not know. All that is part of the knowledge God has kept to Himself. If the Qur'ān does not speak to us about it, then any interpretation is simply guesswork lacking foundation.[§]

It is Divine mercy and justice which has required that these messengers tell mankind about what God has prepared in the way of happiness and bliss for those who respond to Him and obey Him. It is their task also to warn mankind against the suffering in hell God has prepared for those who disobey. All this has a definite

[§] For further discussion on the *Kalām* attribute, please refer to section 1.5 of *A Critique of 'In the Shade of the Qur'ān.'*

purpose: *"So that people may have no argument against God once these messengers had come."* (Verse 165)

To God belongs the overriding argument against all creation. God has given man intelligence of the type that enables him to understand every sign that points towards faith. Nevertheless, Divine mercy is demonstrated in the fact that messengers have been sent by God to remind people and show them the way. The role of these messengers is to try to liberate human intelligence from the fetters of desire, which conceal the signs and indicators leading to faith. God is Almighty, which means that He is able to punish people for what they perpetrate. He is also *"Wise"*. He deals with every matter wisely. Both His might and wisdom have their role in what He decides and does.

A multitude of subtle and profound impressions are left in our minds as we read the statement: *"So that people may have no argument against God once these messengers had come."* (Verse 165) We will briefly discuss only three of these impressions so as to keep within the framework we have set for ourselves in this commentary.

There is firstly the question of the value of human intellect and its role in believing in God. Man's life on earth, its substance, form, direction and action, is based on this question of faith, as is man's destiny in the hereafter, which is even more serious and everlasting.

God certainly knows man, his potentials and his limits. Had He known that the intellect He granted man is sufficient for him to distinguish guidance and to identify his overall interest in this life and the life to come, He would have left him to his intellect. This would mean, then, that man would rely entirely on his intellect to search for and interpret all signs and indicators that draw him closer to faith. This also means that man would be left to draw up a constitution and a way of life which keep him away from error, relying solely on his intellect. Had this been true, God would not have sent messengers to people throughout history, nor would He have assigned them the role of conveying His Divine message. Indeed, the opposite is true: had there been no messenger sent by God with His guidance, He would have allowed people a powerful argument against Himself: *"So that people may have no argument against God once these messengers had come."* (Verse 165)

God knows that the intellect He has given man is inadequate as a tool to achieve guidance by itself, without being assisted, directed and disciplined by a Divine message. It is also inadequate to draw a course for human life that ensures that man achieves his best interest and saves himself from doom in this life and in the life to come. Knowing all this, God's wisdom and mercy have dictated that He sends messengers to mankind and He does not hold people to account until His message has been conveyed to them: *"We would not have punished any community before We have*

sent a messenger [to them]." (17:15) Considering this Qur'ānic statement, this seems to be readily apparent, or at least an essential requirement.

This leads to the question: What is the role of human intellect in the question of believing in God and determining man's way of life?

In short, it is to receive the message and to understand what the messenger conveys to it. The role of the messenger is to explain his message and to rescue human nature from what blurs its vision and to alert the human intellect to everything within man and in the universe which points in the direction of faith. The messenger also draws for man the method of receiving Divine guidance and how to deal with it. He also shows man the basis on which practical life is conducted according to the Divine method, in order to enable man to achieve what is best for him in this life and what is best in the life to come.

The Human Mind and Divine Messages

It should be clear in our minds that it is not for the human intellect to pass judgement on the principles laid down by religion. Nor can we judge through normal human reasoning the validity or otherwise of religious orders and prohibitions, or indeed decide whether to accept or reject them, after having ascertained their meaning and that they have been proclaimed by God. Had it been up to the human intellect to reject Divine legislation, because it disapproves of them or does not wish to respond to them, no punishment would have been incurred for rejecting the Divine faith after it was explained. Man is, indeed, required to accept religious teachings once he gets to know them through a proper source and has correctly understood their import.

When we say that this message of Islam addresses the human mind, we mean that it awakens our minds and directs us to use a proper method of evaluation. It certainly does not mean that it is up to our minds to judge whether the message of Islam is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Once we have an authentic statement, it provides the judgement to be obeyed and enforced, whether it sounds immediately acceptable or totally strange. We use our minds to understand the import of a particular statement, in accordance with linguistic rules and idiomatic usage. Once the import of a particular statement is ascertained, it remains valid and enforceable because it is a statement given by God. We cannot consider the human intellect a deity to evaluate and judge what has been given to us by God.

A great deal of confusion may occur here. Some people try to give the human intellect the role of a deity, giving it the power to judge the validity or otherwise of authentic religious instructions. Others try to minimise its importance and the role it plays in accepting the faith and following guidance. Neither attitude is correct. It is

the middle attitude, which we have already explained, that is the proper and correct one. What it means practically is that man cannot put religious teachings against premises of his own, which he might have already developed on the basis of human logic, observations or experience. The proper attitude is that he should develop and establish his premises on the basis of correct and authentic religious statements. These are certainly more correct than his own premises and rely on a more accurate system than his own.

It is perfectly acceptable that one intellectual understanding of a religious statement may be opposed by another. Once a statement admits more than one interpretation according to the principles and methodology approved by Islam, then no authority or individual can restrict people or compel them to follow a single interpretation or force on them one way of implementation. Again this is part of the meaning of our statement that the message of Islam addresses human intellect.

It is true that Islam is the religion of reason. This means that it does not use any supernatural power in order to make our minds submit to it. It explains its principles, judgements and teachings in a way that addresses our minds. It calls on us to contemplate and reflect on every aspect of creation within ourselves and in the universe at large. Such contemplation will undoubtedly point the way in the direction of accepting the faith. Thus, it attempts to free the human mind from the pressures of familiarity, continuity, laziness, as well as from desires that distract minds and distort human nature. Its address to the human mind means that man is not compelled to believe in what he cannot understand. It assigns to us the task of understanding the statements which express religious teachings. Once we have understood these, we have the choice of submission to them — and in this case we are believers — or denying them and becoming unbelievers. We cannot pass a judgement of validity or invalidity on separate religious statements. Nor do we have the right to accept or reject them. We cannot select and choose. Otherwise, we will be believing in part of the Divine message whilst denying other parts. Those who do this are described in the Qur'ān as unbelievers, and have been warned against grievous punishment. When God states something about the universe, man, creation, or religious teachings, His commandments must be obeyed and implemented by everyone who is aware of them and understands their import.

God, glorified be He, says: *"God is He who has created seven heavens and a similar number of the earth."* (65: 12) *"Are the unbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were [once) one single entity and We split them apart? — and that We made out of water every living thing?"* (21: 30) *"God has created all animals out of water"* (24: 45) *"He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the jinn He has created out of smokeless fire."* (55: 14-15) He also states many other things about the nature of the universe, life and creation. All that He has stated is the truth, no doubt. It is not up to

the human intellect to say, after having understood these texts, that their import does not agree with human knowledge or experience. That knowledge and experience is liable to err, while God's statements are always true.

Similarly, God makes in the Qur'ān statements such as: *"Those who do not judge according to what God has bestowed from on high are indeed unbelievers."*(5: 44) *"Believers, fear God and give up what remains outstanding of usury gains, if you are true believers. If you do not, then war is declared against you by God and His messenger. If you repent, however, you shall remain entitled to your principal. Thus, you shall commit no wrong, nor suffer any wrong yourselves."* (2: 278-9) *"And stay in your homes and do not flaunt your charms as women used to do in the old days of pagan ignorance."* (33: 33) *"Let [Muslim women] draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. And let them not display their charms."* (24: 31) He also delivers many other statements and teachings which have a direct bearing on people's way of life. These statements are correct and valid. It is not up to the human intellect to say that something which is in conflict with Divine teachings is more valid or serves people's interests better. Intellectual judgement is liable to error and can be influenced by desire. What God has determined can only be right.

As we see, the same rule applies to what God has stated in matters of faith and concepts, and to His statement with regard to the way of life which must be implemented. Once a statement is authentic, definitive and not restricted to a particular time, then it must be implemented. We cannot say: we accept the ideological part and what relates to worship, but times have changed and we choose our own system. Had it been God's wish to make a particular ruling or legislation limited to a particular time, He would have made that clear. We can use our human intellect and discretion in applying a particular statement to a certain case. This is different from accepting or rejecting a piece of legislation in principle.

The foregoing does not limit the role of the human mind or belittle its importance. It has wide scope open to it in determining how religious statements apply to new situations. It also has wide scope in trying to understand the nature of the universe, its potentials and the forces working within it as well as the nature of different creatures, and to make use of what God has given us in this universe. It can play a great role in improving the quality of life and developing it according to the Divine system, not by merely following the dictates of desire which throw the mind off the right course.

Making God's Argument

We need to consider from another angle the statement, *"so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers had come"*. (Verse 165)

It is indeed a great responsibility which has been assigned to God's messengers,

(peace be upon them all) and those who believe in their messages towards humanity. For the destiny of mankind, in both this life and the life to come, depends primarily on the messengers and their followers. If they convey this message to people, as they are required to do, people may achieve reward and happiness in both this world and the next. Otherwise, they live in misery and deserve punishment.

When we describe this as a great responsibility, we are only making a statement of fact. Indeed God's messengers have shown themselves to be keenly aware of the great importance of their task. God has pointed out to them the true nature of their responsibility. He made it clear to His last Messenger that the message he has been assigned is a weighty one, which he needed to prepare himself for: *"O you enwrapped one, keep awake [in prayer] at night, all but a small part of one half of it, or make it a little less than that, or add to it; and recite the Qur'ān calmly and distinctly, with your mind attuned to its meaning. We shall bestow on you a weighty message."* (73: 1-5) *"It is We who have bestowed from on high this Qur'ān on you, step by step, truly a bestowal from on high. Await, then, in all patience your Lord's judgement and pay no heed to any of them who is a wilful sinner or an ingrate; and bear in mind your Lord's name at morning and evening and during some of the night, and prostrate yourself before Him, and extol His limitless glory throughout the long night."* (76: 23-6) It is this meaning which God makes clear to the Prophet and He commands him to make certain statements which show that he truly understands the message he has been given and its great importance: *"Say; indeed no one could ever protect me from God, nor could I ever find a place to hide from Him, if I should fail to convey [to the world what has come to me] from God and His messages... He alone knows that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and to none does He disclose what He has chosen to keep to Himself of His unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to a messenger whom He has been pleased to elect... so as to make manifest that it is indeed only their Lord's messages that these [messengers] deliver."* (72: 22-8)

The question then is that of mankind's life, happiness and reward, indeed of existence itself. Either man accepts the Divine message when it is conveyed to him and implements it to achieve happiness in this life and in the life to come, or he rejects it and brings misery upon himself in both worlds. Alternatively, if no message has been conveyed to him, he has an argument to make against God. In this case, the responsibility for the misery he endures in this life lies fairly and squarely on those who have been assigned the task of conveying God's message but who have failed to do so.

As for God's messengers, (peace be upon them all), they have indeed been faithful to their trust and conveyed their message. They have discharged their responsibility and gone to their Lord. They have not only conveyed the message by word of mouth, but they have also provided a practical example to be followed, and have striven hard, day and night, to remove all impediments of every shape and form: suspicions

raised, temptations offered and tyrannical forces turning people away from faith. This is what Muĥammad (peace be upon him), God's Messenger and the last of all Prophets did. Since his was the final and complete message, he did not merely speak of removing impediments, but he actually removed them with action so that *"there is no more oppression and that submission is made to God".* (2: 193)

The same hard task continues to be assigned to those who believe in his message. Generations come and go and the Divine message must be conveyed to all by the Prophet's followers. They will not fulfil their heavy responsibility, make God's argument against people, and save them from misery in this life and suffering in the hereafter, unless they actually convey God's message, on the same lines followed by the Prophet Muĥammad (peace be upon him). People are the same throughout all generations and the message is the same. There are, however, diversions, which lead us astray, tempting desires and doubts; and there are tyrannical forces which try to turn us away from faith, either by deception or by brute force. The same situation then, the same impediments and the same people!

The task must be fulfilled and the message conveyed by word of mouth and practical action testifying to the effects brought about by the implementation of the message. Moreover, impediments must be removed. Otherwise, the message is not properly conveyed. There is simply no way this task can be left undone, otherwise the responsibility for mankind's continued error, their misery in this life and their having an argument to make in front of God on the Day of Reckoning must be faced. This is indeed a fearsome responsibility, sending a shudder through the entire body of anyone who realises that he must face it. No one can take it lightly.

A person who claims to be a Muslim must either convey the message of Islam in the way mentioned above, or he cannot save himself in either this or the next life. When he says that he is a Muslim and stops short of conveying God's message as the Prophet did, he is actually testifying against Islam in which he claims to believe. He is indeed required to make a testimony for Islam so that the following Qur'ānic verse applies to him: *"Thus We have made you the community of the middle way, so that you may stand witness against the rest of mankind and the Messenger shall be a witness against you."* (2: 143)

The testimony a Muslim has to make for Islam begins with himself, his home, family and his immediate society, as he endeavours to make them a living example of Islamic life. The second step in this testimony is his advocacy of Islamic life, as he calls on all mankind to implement Islam in their personal, social, economic and political life. The final step is his striving hard, i.e. *jihād,* for the removal of impediments which cause people to live in error and which turn them away from faith, regardless of what these impediments are. If he sacrifices his life for this cause, he is then a martyr, or, to use the Arabic term, *shahīd,* having made his testimony and

sought to please His Lord. The term *shahīd* can only apply to this type of person.

Grace of the Highest Type

Before we conclude our comments on this verse, we need to reflect a little with our heads bowed in acknowledgement of God's greatness, His knowledge of man, His fairness to him, as well as the care, mercy and grace He extends to him, despite his excessive ingratitude.

Let us first reflect for a moment on God's thorough and perfect knowledge of man, his capabilities and potentials, as well as his inherent susceptibility to follow guidance or to go astray. It is on the basis of His knowledge of man that God has not left him to what his mind, the great gift He has given him, may dictate, even though it makes numerous and clear indicators which point out the way to faith. God knows that this great tool He has placed at man's disposal may be influenced by man's desires and that the indicators He has placed all over the horizon and within man himself may be screened from man, deliberately or through ignorance. Therefore, He does not hold man's intellect responsible for following right guidance or for turning away from it until He has made it clear to him through His messengers. Moreover, even after such a clear message has been given, the task of devising a way of life is not assigned to man. What he is assigned is the implementation of the way of life laid down by God. Beyond that, God has given man a vast dominion to do with it whatever he likes, changing it as he pleases, and analysing it the way he wishes.

We should also reflect a little on the Divine justice which provides people with an argument against God, had He not sent them messengers to raise before them happy prospects and also to warn them against the pitfalls in their way. These messengers are sent in addition to all the indicators in the universe and within man, testifying to God's oneness, His great creation, profound knowledge and infinite ability. Added to this is also the strong inclination of human nature to believe in God and to submit to Him. We should also remember in this respect the harmony between the indicators in the universe and the natural inclination and ability of man's mind to collate information and arrive at conclusions. God, however, is fully aware of the weaknesses that may affect all these factors, clouding their work, bluring people's vision and causing them to arrive at the wrong findings. Therefore, the pointers of the universe, human nature and intellect are not judged by God as sufficient on their own, unless He sends messengers to make sure that these instruments are not influenced by any foreign element as also to control their work according to the right standard shown in the Divine message. It is only when this is accomplished that the universe, human nature, and intellect will give the right and proper judgement. At this point in time, it becomes obligatory for people to submit to God and to obey

Him. Their argument for not doing so is rendered futile and they, then, deserve punishment.

We must also reflect a little on the great care God takes of man and the grace He bestows on him, knowing, as He does, what weaknesses and shortcomings he may have. Nevertheless, He puts him in charge of the earth, which is, to man, a great kingdom, although it is no more than a little particle within God's great dominion.

God's care, grace and mercy take man even further. Despite all the indicators and the work of God's messengers, man continues to reject the faith, stubbornly following erring ways. Yet God does not withhold from him His grace and favour. Nor does He deprive him of the guidance He has made available through His messengers. Indeed, He does not inflict punishment on him either in this world or in the hereafter until His messengers have conveyed His messages and man continues in rejecting them until his death.

Man very often boasts to himself that he can do without his Lord, His care, mercy, guidance, religion and messengers. He claims that he has all he needs for proper guidance, making use of his intellect, when God, his Creator, knows that this is not sufficient for him, unless it is set on the proper course pointed out by Him. This brings to mind the example of a little child just beginning to walk. He feels a little strength in his legs and lets go of his mother's supporting hand. He immediately stumbles and falls. The child in this example, however, is wiser and more responsive to nature. He is naturally inclined to make use of his latent skill, develop his ability, train his muscles and become totally independent. By contrast, the man who lets go of God's supporting hand has no natural inclination to steer away from Divine guidance. The best that he can do for himself is to follow Divine guidance, which ensures that all his powers are used properly and directed wisely. If he turns away from Divine guidance and trusts to his own devices, his powers will be certain to malfunction.

Erroneous, indeed, is every claim which suggests that great minds are not in need of God's message to make great achievements. The fact is that the Divine message provides the human mind with the proper method of reflection and deduction to arrive at proper conclusions. If it errs, its error is similar to that of a clock set right, but later influenced by atmospheric and other factors affecting its movement. It is not like the error of a clock that was never properly set, but left to work at random, giving the right time only by pure coincidence. The difference between the two is great indeed.

Using his intellect and guided by the Divine message, man can make great achievements to which he cannot aspire otherwise. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout human history, no great mind has managed to devise the ideological

concept, the personal discipline, the code of living or the social system which ordinary intellects were able to devise when guided by the Divine message.

Plato and Aristotle were endowed with great minds. It is even said that Aristotle had the greatest mind in human history. When we consider his concept of the Divine being as he devised it independently from God's guidance, we realise how greatly inferior it is to the concept of an ordinary Muslim who follows the Divine message.

In ancient Egypt, Akhenaton advocated monotheism. He might have been influenced by the messages of the Prophets Abraham and Joseph, but even then, there are gaps and legends in his faith making the monotheistic concept of an ordinary Muslim infinitely superior to Akhenaton's monotheistic religion.

In moral standards, we find in the early periods of Islam ordinary people, educated and disciplined by God's Messenger, achieving heights to which even the greatest of people cannot aspire, when they are not guided by a Divine message. As for principles, systems and legislation, Islam achieves a degree of balance and harmony which is absolutely unique. The sort of harmony and ease of life which are characteristic of Islamic society are never to be found in any other society, prior to Islam or after it.

It is not the standard of material civilisation which we should judge. This is something that increases with scientific advancement. The quality of life at any particular time is judged by the balance and harmony achieved between all its aspects and systems. That balance is the source of happiness which brings out all human potentials and gives them a chance to work in harmony, without any excesses. As we have already said, humanity has never known a perfect system such as that of Islam. Imbalance is characteristic of every non-Islamic system, although it may have its bright aspects. It is always the trend that certain aspects of human life may be promoted at the expense of others. With such an imbalance, humanity continues to suffer. Its only saviour is the perfect, balanced and harmonious system of Islam.

The Supreme Witness

What we have said so far is sufficient to explain the clear feelings generated by the Qur'ānic statement: *"[These] were messengers sent to bring good news and to give warning, so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers (had come). God is Almighty, Wise."* (Verse 165) We will now proceed with our commentary on the rest of this passage.

People however may deny that message for different reasons. People who have received earlier revelations from God through earlier prophets may deny the final

message given to Muĥammad (peace be upon him), although it follows the same pattern of sending messengers to bring happy news to God's servants and to warn them against disbelief. Those who received earlier revelations believe in the messengers who were sent before Muĥammad: the Jews acknowledged all messengers who came before Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Christians acknowledged all these as well as Jesus, to whom they attribute a Divine nature, as will be explained later. Addressing the Prophet, God consoles him for facing such rejection: *"However it be, God [Himself] bears witness to the truth of what He has bestowed from on high to you: with His knowledge He bestowed it from on high; and the angels also bear witness to that; although God is sufficient as a witness."* (Verse 166)

This testimony by God and the angels, some of whom were entrusted with carrying the message to Muĥammad (peace be upon him), reduces to nothing all that may be said by those claiming to follow earlier revelations. What significance have they when God Himself gives His testimony and the angels do likewise? Surely God's testimony is enough on its own. Coming when it did, this testimony provided consolation to the Prophet for the stern opposition by the Jews to his message and their scheming against it. It also provided assurance to the early Muslims in Madinah who faced determined assaults from the Jews, the magnitude of which is evidenced by the campaign launched in the Qur'ān to repel it.

This testimony is followed by a stern and fearsome warning to those who deny the message of Islam. *"Those who disbelieve and debar others from the way of God have indeed gone far astray. Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. That is indeed easy for God."* (Verses 167-169)

The description of the unbelievers contained in this warning, though general in its import, applies primarily to the Jews and describes their attitude towards Islam and the Muslims, and indeed towards the truth generally. It applies equally to those of them who lived in the early days of Islam in Madinah and those who lived at the time of Moses himself, as well as to succeeding generations of Jews up to the present day, with the exception of a small number who opened their hearts to Divine guidance and followed it.

Those Jews, as well as any group of people to whom the description of disbelieving and debarring others from the way of God applies, have indeed gone far astray. They have turned away from God's guidance and strayed from the proper way of life which ensures man's happiness. They have erred in their concepts and beliefs, behaviour and social system, and in every aspect of this life generally. This means that their concept regarding the life to come is also erroneous.

Immense in error as they are, there is little hope that they can recognise Divine

guidance and follow it. For they *"have indeed gone far astray"*.

They are again described as unbelievers, but this time they are also described as wrongdoers. To disbelieve is indeed to act wrongfully and to do injustice to the truth, to self and to mankind. Sometimes the Qur'ān describes disbelief as injustice or wrongdoing, as in God's statement: *"To associate partners with God is to commit grave injustice."* (31: 31) He also says: *"They who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are indeed wrongdoers."* (5: 45) In the preceding verse, He describes them as unbelievers. (This will be discussed in detail in Volume IV, God willing.)

As for those Jews, they did not commit only the injustice of associating partners with God but they also persisted in wrongdoing by debarring people from the way of God. In other words, they were up to their ears in disbelief and wrongdoing.

Hence, their just punishment is determined by God: *"Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time."* (Verses 168-169) It is unfair that God should forgive such people after they have gone far astray and deprived themselves of every chance of forgiveness. It is also unfair that He should guide them to any road other than that leading to hell, because they have turned away from every road of guidance and sealed off every route leading anywhere other than the one leading to hell. They have gone far along that road, deserving to stay in hell for ever, without any hope of being saved again.

"That is indeed easy for God", for He has the upper hand over every one of His servants. Moreover, He has no special relationship with anyone of His creation to make it difficult for Him to exact such a just punishment. Nor can their punishment be made less easy by any power or force possessed by His servants. The Jews and the Christians used to say that they were God's own children and His beloved ones. They also said: *"The fire will not touch us except for a small number of days."* (2: 80) They also claimed to be God's chosen people. The Qur'ān denies all this and puts them back in their place among God's other servants. They have the same prospects as anyone else: they receive reward if they do well, and they are punished if they do badly, do not repent or pray for forgiveness. All this is easy for God.

This is followed by a universal call to all mankind, to tell them that God's Messenger has come to them with the truth from their Lord. He who believes in him does well. Those who deny him should know that God has no need for any of them and He can overpower them all. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He is aware of everything, and He runs all affairs according to His knowledge and wisdom:

Mankind, the Messenger has now come to you with the truth from your Lord. Believe, then, for it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (Verse 170)

This call to all mankind to believe in the last message was preceded by a recital of all the false claims made by people to whom revelations were given at earlier times. This together with the unmasking of the true nature of the Jews and their evil deeds throughout their history. Their inherent obstinacy, even in their attitude towards Moses, their Prophet, leader and saviour, is also exposed. The call is also preceded by an explanation of the nature of this last message and its purpose, both of which require that God sends messengers and sends Muĥammad to all mankind. Having sent a number of messengers with messages to their own nations, it is only logical that this process should culminate with a final, universal message to all mankind *"so that people may have no argument against God, once the messengers had come"*. Had this final message not been addressed to all mankind, later generations would have had an argument against God. But the final and universal message of Muĥammad (peace be upon him) has stopped any such argument. To deny that a message should come after the Jewish prophets, including or excluding Jesus (peace be upon him), is contrary to God's justice which ensures that no punishment can be exacted without having first sent a message. As it happened, there was no universal message prior to Islam. Such a universal message was, therefore, inevitable, to ensure God's justice and mercy to mankind. This proves God's description of His Messenger: *"We have only sent you as mercy to mankind."* (21: 107) He is, indeed, a manifestation of God's mercy in this life and in the life to come, as appears clearly from this Qur'anic statement.

15
The Truth About Jesus

People of earlier revelations! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not say about God anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger from God and His Word which He gave to Mary and a soul from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say, "[God is] a trinity!" Desist, for that will be better for you. God is only One God. Infinite He is in His Glory! [To imagine] that He may have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Sufficient is God as a guardian. (171)

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَا تَغۡلُواْ فِي دِينِكُمۡ
وَلَا تَقُولُواْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلۡحَقَّۚ إِنَّمَا
ٱلۡمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَ رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ
وَكَلِمَتُهُۥٓ أَلۡقَىٰهَآ إِلَىٰ مَرۡيَمَ وَرُوحٞ مِّنۡهُۖ
فَـَٔامِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦۖ وَلَا تَقُولُواْ ثَلَٰثَةٌۚ
ٱنتَهُواْ خَيۡرٗا لَّكُمۡۚ إِنَّمَا ٱللَّهُ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞۖ
سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥٓ أَن يَكُونَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٞۘ لَّهُۥ مَا فِي
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ
وَكِيلٗا ١٧١

Never did the Christ feel too proud to be God's servant, nor do the angels who are near to Him. Those who feel too proud to worship Him and glory in their arrogance will He gather all together before Himself; (172)

لَّن يَسۡتَنكِفَ ٱلۡمَسِيحُ أَن يَكُونَ عَبۡدٗا
لِّلَّهِ وَلَا ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبُونَۚ وَمَن يَسۡتَنكِفۡ
عَنۡ عِبَادَتِهِۦ وَيَسۡتَكۡبِرۡ فَسَيَحۡشُرُهُمۡ
إِلَيۡهِ جَمِيعٗا ١٧٢

then, to those who believe and do good deeds, He will grant their reward in full, and will give them yet more out of His bounty; while those who feel too proud and glory in their arrogance He will cause to suffer a grievous punishment. They shall find none to protect them from God and none to bring them any help. (173)

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
فَيُوَفِّيهِمۡ أُجُورَهُمۡ وَيَزِيدُهُم مِّن فَضۡلِهِۦۖ
وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَنكَفُواْ وَٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ
فَيُعَذِّبُهُمۡ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُم
مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيّٗا وَلَا نَصِيرٗا ١٧٣

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدْ جَآءَكُم بُرْهَٰنٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا ﴿١٧٤﴾

Mankind, a clear proof has now come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a glorious light. (174)

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱعْتَصَمُوا۟ بِهِۦ فَسَيُدْخِلُهُمْ فِى رَحْمَةٍ مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلٍ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَيْهِ صِرَٰطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا ﴿١٧٥﴾

Those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, will He surely admit to His mercy and grace, and will guide them to Himself along a straight path. (175)

يَسْتَفْتُونَكَ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُفْتِيكُمْ فِى ٱلْكَلَٰلَةِ ۚ إِنِ ٱمْرُؤٌا۟ هَلَكَ لَيْسَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٌ وَلَهُۥٓ أُخْتٌ فَلَهَا نِصْفُ مَا تَرَكَ ۚ وَهُوَ يَرِثُهَآ إِن لَّمْ يَكُن لَّهَا وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِن كَانَتَا ٱثْنَتَيْنِ فَلَهُمَا ٱلثُّلُثَانِ مِمَّا تَرَكَ ۚ وَإِن كَانُوٓا۟ إِخْوَةً رِّجَالًا وَنِسَآءً فَلِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ ٱلْأُنثَيَيْنِ ۗ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ أَن تَضِلُّوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌۢ ﴿١٧٦﴾

They will ask you for a verdict. Say, God Himself gives you His ruling concerning [inheritance from] a person who leaves no heir in the direct line. If a man dies childless and has a sister, she shall inherit one-half of what he has left, just as he shall inherit all her [property] if she dies childless. But if there are two sisters, they shall both together have two-thirds of whatever he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females' share. God makes all this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows everything. (176)

Overview

This last passage of this second longest *sūrah* in the Qur'ān is a confrontation with the Christians just as the preceding one was a confrontation with the Jews. Both had received revelations from God through their prophets in earlier times. They are, therefore, addressed in the Qur'ān as "people of the Book", or *"people of earlier revelations"* in our preferred rendering of the relevant Arabic terms. In the preceding passage, the *sūrah* did justice to Jesus, son of Mary, and his pure mother against the fabrications of the Jews. It also stated the view of the true faith concerning the alleged crucifixion and also did justice to the truth itself against the Jews, their schemes and stubborn opposition. In this passage, the *sūrah* also states the view of the true faith and does justice to Jesus, son of Mary, against the excesses of the Christians themselves. It also shows the fallacy of pagan legends that have crept into

Christianity from all nations and creeds with whom Christianity has come into close contact. These include Greek and Roman legends as well as Egyptian and Indian mythology.

Having found the faith of the people of earlier revelations full of distortions and rife with alien mythology, the Qur'ān has taken it upon itself to put this faith back into its original, true form. It also states the truth concerning the faith of the pagan Arabs which combined some remaining traces of the original faith of Abraham, (peace be upon him) covered by a great heap of legends and ignorant absurdities.

Indeed, Islam aims to state the true concept of Godhead to all mankind. It eliminates every distortion, excess, and complacency in human thinking. It puts right among other philosophies mistaken notions about the concept of God's oneness in the philosophy of Aristotle in Athens before the Christian era, Plotinus in Alexandria after Christianity, as well as all intervening and subsequent philosophies and concepts. All these grope in the dark, guided only by the flickering ray of the human mind which cannot be properly guided without a message from God.

The main issue discussed in this passage is that of the trinity, including the legend of whose son Jesus was. It goes on to state the true concept of God's oneness.

At the time when Islam was revealed, the Christian faith, including all denominations, was based on the concept of one god in three elements or manifestations: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is considered the son. Beyond that there are great differences among Christian sects with regard to Jesus Christ and whether he has a dual nature: Divine and human, or a single Divine nature; whether he has a single will despite his dual nature; whether time does not apply to him in the same way as it does not apply to the Father; and whether or not he was created. There are numerous concepts which vary much and which have led to persecution by one sect or another.

If we closely follow the history of the Christian faith, we are bound to come to the conclusion that the concept of trinity and that of Jesus being the son of God, (limitless is God in His glory) were unknown to the early Christians. Also unknown to them was the concept of Mary's Divine nature and her being included in the various concepts of trinity. These concepts were introduced into Christianity much later, at different times, when pagans embraced Christianity without altogether abandoning their pagan and polytheistic concepts. It is perhaps more likely that the concept of trinity was imported from ancient Egyptian religions, such as the concept of the trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus, as well as the many other trinities in ancient Egyptian religions.

Unitarian Christians continued to resist every type of persecution which they suffered at the hands of Roman emperors and the various synods which followed the

line dictated by the state until the sixth century, suffering in the process untold torture.

The concept of trinity continues to represent an intellectual shock to Christian intelligentsia. The Church tries to make it acceptable to them by all means possible, including references to something unknown, the secrets of which will not be given to man until the day when everything in the heavens and on the earth is laid bare. Potter, the author of a treatise entitled "Fundamentals and Details" who is considered one of the main commentators on the Christian faith, states in his comments on the concept of trinity, "We have understood this as best as our minds can do. We however, hope to understand it more clearly in the future, when everything in the heavens and on earth is laid bare."

It is not our intention to give a historical account of the method and stages by which this concept has crept into Christianity. We will confine ourselves to the study of the Qur'ānic verses in this *sūrah* which aim at correcting this concept, alien as it is to true monotheism.

Truth and Falsehood in People's Beliefs

> *People of earlier revelations! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not say about God anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger from God and His Word which He gave to Mary and a soul from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say, "[God is] a trinity!" Desist, for that will be better for you. God is only One God. Infinite He is in His Glory! [To imagine] that He may have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Sufficient is God as a guardian.* (Verse 171)

This verse describes the claim that God has a son as overstepping the bounds of truth. It is nothing short of the type of excess which enabled the people who had received earlier revelations to make false claims about God and allege that He had a son. Far removed is such an idea from Him. They also allege that God is a trinity.

The concepts of fatherhood and trinity have gone through different stages with Christians, according to how advanced or backward the intellectual status of different generations may have been. The thought of God having a son sounds repugnant to human nature. The higher one's education, the more absurd that idea appears to him. The Christians were compelled, therefore, to try to make their claims more plausible by saying that the Son was not born as human beings are. It was merely a relationship of love between the father and the son. They have also tried to explain away the concept of trinity by saying that the three elements are "attributes" of the Divine Being who may have three different states. Hard as they may try, they

remain unable to give a rational explanation of these paradoxical concepts. Hence, they give them a mysterious outlook and claim that their reality will not completely appear until the secrets of the heavens and the earth are revealed.

Infinite is God in His glory. He neither has nor needs any partner. Nor is anyone similar to Him in any way. The very fact that He is the Creator means that He is different from all creatures. It stands to reason that the Creator should be different from His creation, the owner different from his property. It is to this fact that this Qur'ānic verse refers: *"God is only One God. Infinite He is in His Glory! [To imagine] that He may have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Sufficient is God as a guardian."* (Verse 171)

That the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him) without a father seems miraculous and preternatural to human beings is only because it is totally different from what is familiar. We must remember that what is familiar to us is certainly not all that is in the universe. Nor are the natural laws we know the only laws in the universe. We must remember that God creates natural laws and sets them into operation according to His will, which is unrestricted, free, absolute.

As regards Jesus Christ, God says the following, and what He says is always true: *"The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger from God and His Word which He gave to Mary and a soul from Him."* (Verse 171) He is, then, definitely and undoubtedly "a messenger from God". He is the same as the rest of God's messengers, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Muĥammad, and the other most honourable servants of God whom He selected to convey His message to mankind at various points in time.

"And His Word which He gave to Mary" Perhaps the best explanation of this phrase is that God created Jesus through a direct command which is described in various places in the Qur'ān and which means that when God wants to create something He only says to it "Be", and there it is. He casts this Word to Mary to create Jesus in her womb, without going through the process which is familiar to us humans and which involves a woman's egg being fertilised by a man's sperm. That is how human beings are created, apart from Adam. God's command can create everything and anything from nothing. No wonder that it can create Jesus in Mary's womb with the breathing of His spirit to which reference is made in the following part of the verse. *"And a soul from Him."*

The Breathing of God's Spirit

Formerly, God breathed of His spirit into the clay from which Adam was made, and thus Adam became a man. God says in the Qur'ān: *"When your Lord said to the angels: I am creating a human being from clay. When I have fashioned him and breathed into*

him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration." (38: 71-2) In the context of the creation of Jesus and referring to Jesus's mother, He also says: *"As for the one who guarded her chastity, We breathed into her of Our spirit."* (21: 91) The matter is, then, not without precedent. The spirit to which reference is made in all these statements is the same. None of the people who received revelations before Islam and who believed in Adam's creation and that God breathed into him of His spirit claim that Adam was a god, or one of the elements which constitute the Divine Being, as some people allege regarding Jesus. The two cases are similar: both have spirit breathed into them and both were created in the same fashion. Indeed, Adam was created without either a father or a mother, while Jesus was created having a mother. God also states: *"The case of Jesus in the sight of God is the same as the case of Adam. He created him of dust, and then said to him: 'Be', and he was,* (3: 59)

We see how clear and simple the whole issue is. We, therefore, wonder how personal prejudices and lingering traces of polytheism have added all this complexity to the simple issue of the creation of Jesus in the minds of one generation after another. The Creator who gave Adam, who had no parents, a human life which is different from that of all other creatures by breathing into him of His own spirit is the One who has given the same human life to Jesus who had no father. This simple, straightforward explanation is far more logical and easier to understand than those endless legends which speak of Jesus's Divine nature simply because he was born with no father. These legends, however, do not stop there. They also speak of the Divinity of the three elements of the trinity. Far exalted is God above all that.

"So believe in God and His messengers and do not say, '(God is] a trinity!' Desist, for that will be better for you." (Verse 171) Having given this simple and straightforward explanation, the *sūrah* makes this timely call to all mankind to believe in God and His messengers, including Jesus, who was only a messenger of God, and including Muĥammad, the last of God's messengers. To do so means to desist from making any false claim or advancing any legend or superstition.

"God is only One God." (Verse 171) This is a fact to which the consistency of natural laws, the unity of creation and its single method testify. It is also endorsed by human intellect, for the whole matter is easily appreciated by our minds which cannot imagine a creator looking the same as his creation and cannot conceive how three can merge into one, nor how one can be three.

"Infinite He is in His Glory! [To imagine] that He may have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth." (Verse 171) To have a son is only an extension of the existence of someone who dies. It is a sort of survival through offspring. God the Eternal has no need to continue His existence in the shape of mortals. Whatever exists in the heavens and on earth belongs to Him. It is sufficient for all mankind to be God's servants. He takes care of them all and there is no need

to claim or imagine that He may have a closer relationship with them by having a son from among their number. The relationship between Him and them is one of protection and guardianship: *"Sufficient is God as a guardian."* (Verse 171)

We see that the Qur'ān does not stop at explaining the truth in perfect clarity with regard to beliefs. It goes further to reassure people that God looks after them and will see to it that they have their needs and interests served. With such reassurance, they are able to surrender themselves to Him.

Was Jesus Too Proud?

The *sūrah* goes on to establish the most important issue of the true faith. It states one direct result of the concept of God's oneness, namely, that all creatures are His servants. This means in effect that there is one Godhead to whom everything in the universe, every living creature is a servant. At this juncture, the Qur'ān shows the fallacy of Christian concepts as well as every concept which considers angels to be the children of God or His partners.

> *Never did the Christ feel too proud to be God's servant, nor do the angels who are near to Him. Those who feel too proud to worship Him and glory in their arrogance will He gather all together before Himself, then, to those who believe and do good deeds, He will grant their reward in full, and will give them yet more out of His bounty; while those who feel too proud and glory in their arrogance He will cause to suffer a grievous punishment. They shall find none to protect them from God and none to bring them any help.* (Verses 172-173)

Islam has taken much care to state God's oneness in the clearest of terms so that no trace of partnership with God or similarity to Him in any shape or form may be entertained. It has also taken care to explain that there is absolutely nothing which has any similarity with God — limitless is He in His glory. Nothing has any element, attribute or quality in common with God. Islam also takes care to explain that the true relationship between God and all things, including living creatures, is one between the Creator who is the Lord of the universe and His servants, a description which applies to everything in the universe. When we study the Qur'ān carefully we will not fail to notice the great care it takes to state these facts, or indeed this single fact in all its aspects, so that no trace of ambiguity or suspicion is left.

Islam makes it clear that this is the truth which all God's messengers have stated in the clearest of terms. It includes it in the Qur'ānic account of every messenger and his approach to his people. This is the central principle of all Divine messages from the time of Noah, to the time of Muĥammad, the last of all prophets. Every single one of them has declared very clearly: *"My people, worship God alone, for you have no deity*

other than Him." (11: 61)

It is indeed singular that followers of Divine religions which emphasise this fact most strongly have distorted it and alleged that God may have sons and daughters or may be united with one or more of His creatures in one form or another. In this way, they borrow concepts from pagan religions.

There is, then, an all-pervasive rule that applies to everything in the universe. God is the only deity and all creatures are His servants. People's faith and concepts, and indeed their whole lives, will not be set right unless this basic principle is made absolutely clear, untarnished, pure. To achieve that clarity, people must realise that God is their Lord and they are His servants. He is the Creator and they are creatures; He is the Owner and they belong to Him. In relation to Him they are all the same.

No one is His son and no one has a position of favour with Him except through something that is available to all. They only need to have the will to achieve this position and then they can easily have it through being God-fearing and doing good works.

Their roles, relationships, and indeed their lives generally will not be set on the right footing until the notion has been firmly settled in their minds that they are all servants of one Lord, which means that they are all in the same position towards Him. The means to draw closer to Him is available to everyone, because all human beings are equal and they stand in the same rank towards God. All claims to act as an intermediary between people and God are false. Equally false is every privilege claimed by any individual, group, family or clan. This is, indeed, essential to give credence to the principle that all mankind are equal and their social systems must he established on the basis of this equality.

We are not talking, then, of a mere question of faith considered intellectually before it is finally settled on this firm basis. It is a question of a complete system of life that defines social ties and establishes a complete code for human relationships. It heralds a new birth for man at the hands of Islam, which liberates man from being enslaved by other creatures so as to be a servant of only the Lord of all Creatures. At no time in the history of Islam was there a clerical order that subjugated people under the pretext that it represents God's son who imparts to it a considerable measure of authority. Nor has Islam ever known any form of theocratic government claiming a Divine right alleged to be delegated to it by God.

The Divine right was enjoyed by the Church and popes on the one hand and, on the other, by emperors who claimed for themselves a similar right. Both rights were exercised under the name of the son until the Crusaders launched their campaigns to conquer the land of Islam. On their way back, they carried with them the seeds of rebellion against this Divine right. This has led to the revolts of Martin Luther,

Calvin, and others, which are given the general title of a Reform Movement. They were all influenced by Islam and its clear concept which denies to all human beings any holy position and denies the delegation of Divine authority to man or woman in any way, shape or form. According to Islam, there is only the general relationship which applies to all creatures alike, namely, that Godhead belongs to God alone and everyone else is His servant.

The Ultimate Truth About Jesus

Now the *sūrah* makes a final and decisive statement concerning the claims about the Divine nature of Jesus Christ, his alleged sonship and the divinity claimed for the Holy Spirit. It provides a final and decisive word about every legend claiming that God has any son whatsoever, or that anyone other than God has any element of divinity in any shape or form. This the Qur'ān does by stating that Jesus, son of Mary, is only God's servant who will not disdain to acknowledge his position as such. Similarly, the angels who are favoured with being near to God are also His servants and they will not disdain to be so named. It also states that all creatures shall be gathered together before God and that those who disdain to be described as His servants will have grievous suffering awaiting them. As for those who acknowledge their servitude to God, these shall have great reward.

> *Never did the Christ feel too proud to be God's servant, nor do the angels who are near to Him. Those who feel too proud to worship Him and glory in their arrogance will He gather all together before Himself, then, to those who believe and do good deeds, He will grant their reward in full, and will give them yet more out of His bounty; while those who feel too proud and glory in their arrogance He will cause to suffer a grievous punishment. They shall find none to protect them from God and none to bring them any help.* (Verses 172-173)

Jesus, son of Mary, will never be too proud to accept his position as God's servant. Being God's Prophet and Messenger, Jesus (peace be upon him) was the best one to recognise the true nature of Divinity and that of servitude and that the two cannot be combined. He knew very well that he was only God's creature and that God's creatures cannot be like God or part of Him. He also knew that it is not merely that servitude to God is the only established fact, but also that it does not lower his position in any way. Indeed, no one rejects such servitude to God except an unbeliever who does not recognise the grace involved in the very process of being created. It is also the rank God assigns to His messengers, when they occupy their highest positions. The same applies to favoured angels, including Gabriel, the Holy Spirit. As has already been said, this is a rank that applies to Jesus as well as to all prophets. It is certainly strange that a section of Jesus's followers do not accept for

him what he himself accepts and knows full well.

"Those who feel too proud to worship Him and glory in their arrogance will He gather all together before Himself, then, to those who believe and do good deeds, He will grant their reward in full, and will give them yet more out of His bounty." (Verses 172-173) Their pride will not stop them being gathered by God who has the total authority of Godhead over His servants. His power over them is the same as His power over those who acknowledge their servitude and surrender themselves to Him. Those are likely to do good works, because this is the natural result of such knowledge and submission. These will be granted their reward in full and will be given an increase in addition to that.

On the other side, *"those who feel too proud and glory in their arrogance He will cause to suffer a grievous punishment. They shall find none to protect them from God and none to bring them any help."* (Verse 173) God — limitless is He in His glory — does not want His servants to acknowledge their servitude and to serve Him alone because He needs their service or their worship. Nor does that acknowledgement and submission increase His kingdom in any way. He only wants them to realise the true nature of Divinity and servitude in order to have clear concepts, feelings and systems. Human life with all its systems and concepts cannot be established on a sound basis without this knowledge, acknowledgement and submission.

God wants this principle, with all the aspects we mentioned earlier, to be well established in people's minds and lives, so that they free themselves from the worship of creatures and worship God alone. They will then know who has the final authority in the universe, submit to Him alone and implement His law and system which governs their existence anyway. He wants them to realise that all His creatures are His servants, so that they can face up to anyone other than Him, and prostrate themselves to Him alone. They then stand proud, confident in front of tyrants and despots, while at the same time bowing and prostrating themselves to Him, glorifying Him alone. He wants them to know that winning favour with Him does not come through family relations, but through good works. They will then do well and build the earth in order to win favour with God. Moreover, when they appreciate the true nature of Divinity and servitude, they will rise to defend God's authority on earth when others try to usurp it for themselves, either in His name or otherwise. They will accept nothing of this, but will defer to His authority alone, and their life will become nobler and more honourable when it is conducted on this basis.

When this great principle is fully appreciated, when people's hearts and minds look up to God alone, seeking His pleasure and watching Him before every step or action and establishing their systems on the basis of His guidance, it will add to human life a great credit of goodness, dignity, freedom, justice and honesty. This is the sort of elevation which life on earth experiences as a result of people's submission

to God alone. As for God's reward to those who acknowledge His Divinity and Lordship and exert themselves in doing good, this is certain to come when they meet Him. Whatever He gives them is an aspect of His grace that He bestows on whom He wills.

It is in this light that we should look on the issue of faith as it is explained clearly and lucidly by Islam. We should remember that this is the true basis of all Divine messages and it is the same principle that was central to all Divine messages before they were distorted by those who claimed to be their followers. As we have already said, it represents a new birth of man guaranteeing him dignity, justice, and liberation from all sorts of servitude to creatures, so that he remains free to serve God alone. That servitude is reflected in his worship as well as in his system of life.

Those who disdain to acknowledge their servitude to God are indeed humiliated by other forms of servitude that know no end. They submit to their desires and succumb to superstition and to human beings as well. They recognise that those are human like them, but they nevertheless bow their heads to them and accept their authority over their lives, systems, laws, values and standards. Both groups of people, the ones who are worshipped and the ones who worship them are alike in God's view. The one group humiliate themselves so as to serve the other in this life, but in the life to come, *"He will cause [them] to suffer a grievous punishment. They shall find none to protect them from God and none to bring them any help."* (Verse 173)

This is the greatest issue of faith, which is presented in the above passage so as to provide the final judgement on the distortion perpetrated by Christians at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān. It continues to be the final word against all distortions that may be perpetrated at any future time.

A Glorious Light to Remove All Doubt

As the *sūrah* moves to its conclusion, it makes a general call to all mankind, similar to the one that followed the confrontation with the Jews earlier in the *sūrah.* It tells people that this final message brings its own proof from God and that it is a glorious light which removes all doubt. Those who accept its guidance will receive God's mercy and His grace. They will find themselves guided by this light along a straight path.

> *Mankind, a clear proof has now come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a glorious light. Those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, will He surely admit to His mercy and grace, and will guide them to Himself along a straight path.* (Verses 174-175)

Again, the Qur'ān brings its own proof to mankind from their Lord: *"Mankind, a clear proof has now come to you from your Lord."* (Verse 174) The Divine mark is apparent in the Qur'ān which distinguishes it from what human beings say or write in both construction and message. This is so clear that it is sometimes acknowledged, quite remarkably, by people who do not understand Arabic at all.

We were once travelling by sea across the Atlantic towards our destination, New York. We, six passengers from different Arab countries and most of the crew who came from Nubia in the remote south of Egypt, organised Friday Prayer. It was left to me to deliver the sermon, in which I included several verses from the Qur'ān. All the passengers on board gathered around us to watch.

After we finished Prayer, many passengers came to express to us their admiration for our worship. One of them was a Yugoslav lady fleeing the tyranny of Communism, hoping to settle in the United States. There were tears in her eyes and her voice was trembling as she said in broken English: "I cannot hide my great admiration of your remarkable Prayer. However, this is not what I want to say. I do not understand a single word of your language but I feel that it has an exceptional rhythm which I have not come across in any other language. There were certain paragraphs in the sermon which were even more remarkable and had a greater effect on me."

It was clear that she was referring to the Qur'ānic verses that I had included in the speech, because these have their own special rhythm. I do not say that this applies to everyone who does not speak Arabic, but it is certainly very significant.

As for those who know this language and understand its style and can appreciate its finer expressions and methods of construction, theirs was a special case when they were presented with the Qur'ān by Muĥammad, God's Messenger, (peace be upon him). We know the famous story of al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, Abū Sufyān and Abū Jahl, three of the fiercest opponents of Islam, when they sought to listen to the Qur'ān secretly under the cover of darkness. They came only to listen to the Qur'ān, when the Quraysh tribe had decided not to listen to anything the Prophet said. Nevertheless, these Quraysh leaders came out individually, none knowing anything about what the other two were doing, and none realising that he had companions doing the same thing as he. They sat there, outside the place where the Prophet and his few followers were reading the Qur'ān, to listen to it. At dawn, they went back, hoping to arrive home before anyone could see them. But they met on the road and each then blamed the others. They pledged to one another that they would never do it again. However, all three did the same thing for three consecutive nights, before they made a solemn pledge never to repeat their deed. This is only one among many similar stories. People who appreciate fine style can understand the unique nature of the Qur'ān and its captivating effect on people and the clear proof it provides of the

truthfulness of its message.

We cannot speak in detail here on the subject matter of the Qur'ān, the concept of life it presents, its approach to human life and the system it lays down. In each of these, we have a clear proof of its origin and that it can never be the word of man. It carries the mark of its author, God, the Glorious.

The Qur'ān also provides light: *"And We have sent down to you a glorious light."* (Verse 174) It is a light which lays bare the very nature of things, and defines the parting of the ways of truth and falsehood within man himself and in human life altogether. When it is properly appreciated, this light gives man the ability to see himself and everything around him clearly, without anything covering its nature or presenting itself in a false light or position. Everything then becomes clear and simple so that man wonders how he could not see it so clearly and simply before he was able to benefit by the light of the Qur'ān.

When man allows his soul to be guided by the Qur'ān and receives from it its values and standards, he feels that he has acquired a new element, one which allows him to see all matters with perfect ease and clarity. Many things that used to worry him now fall into place, all appearing as part of a general system, which is simple, natural and clear.

We can dwell at great length on this expression: *"and We have sent down to you a glorious light"*. But whatever we say, we will never be able to describe its message in our own words and we cannot impart its significance to anyone who has not experienced it. Such concepts can only be appreciated by personal experience.

"Those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, will He surely admit to His mercy and grace, and will guide them to Himself along a straight path." (Verse 175) Holding fast to God is an essential quality of faith, when it is properly understood and held. When man appreciates the true nature of God and the fact that all creation are His servants, he realises that his own choice is to hold fast to God alone who has all power over all things. He admits to His mercy and grace those who hold fast to Him. These aspects are shown them in this life as they benefit by the reassurance of faith and spare themselves all the worry experienced by those who have no faith. Moreover, it provides the basis upon which the life of the community and its system is established, clean, free, honest and dignified. Everyone knows his proper place. He is a servant of God and a person of great honour in relation to everyone else. This is something unique to the system of faith as provided by Islam, the system that frees people from service to other creatures, and which makes them submit to God alone. It ensures their absolute equality as it gives all sovereignty to God alone.

The believers, then, enjoy God's mercy and grace in this life as well as in the life to come. He *"will guide them to Himself along a straight path."* The phrase, *"to Himself"*,

adds an exceptional measure of vividness to this expression, as it portrays the believers being guided by God along the path which is straight and which leads them to Him, step by step. Anyone who consciously believes in God and confidently holds fast to Him will appreciate this expression for he feels himself being guided at every moment in his life and before every step. He or she realises that they are drawing closer to God along a straight path. But this cannot be properly appreciated except by those who experience it.

Final Words on Inheritance

> *They will ask you for a verdict. Say, God Himself gives you His ruling concerning [inheritance from] a person who leaves no heir in the direct line. If a man dies childless and has a sister, she shall inherit one-half of what he has left, just as he shall inherit all her [property] if she dies childless. But if there are two sisters, they shall both together have two-thirds of whatever he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females' share. God makes all this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows everything.* (Verse 176)

Thus, this *sūrah* is concluded with a verse that relates to the family system and to social security which is provided within the family. This brings the *sūrah's* conclusion in line with its beginning, when many of the rules of this social system were first explained. Here in conclusion, we have rules governing the inheritance of a person who is described as *kalālah.* This term, defined by Abū Bakr and all scholars, describes someone who has no parents and no children. In other words, he leaves no heir in the direct line of inheritance.

Some of the rules which relate to the estate of such a person were given very early in the *sūrah* defining the way his estate is distributed when he has no heirs on his father's side but is inherited by heirs on his mother's side. In this verse, the rest of the rules governing this form of inheritance are provided. If the deceased who has no heir in the direct line has a sister, whether by both of his parents or by his father only, she inherits half of what her brother leaves behind. In the case of her death, leaving behind no children and no parents, her brother takes all her property after the other heirs who have apportioned shares have taken their shares. If it happens that the deceased person has two sisters by both his parents or by his father only, they share together two-thirds of his property. If he has more brothers and sisters, then the general rule which gives a male twice the share of a female applies in the distribution of his estate. Brothers and sisters by both parents exclude brothers and sisters on the father's side only when both types happen to survive the deceased person.

This verse, providing for the legislation of inheritance, is concluded with a comment that refers all matters to God alone and relates the regulation of duties and

rights, financial or otherwise, to God's law. *"God makes all this clear to you lest you go astray; and God knows everything."*

"Everything" means all things, whether they relate to inheritance or to any other subject, within family relations or community relations. God provides legislations and laws and people have the choice of either following them in all matters or falling into error. The choice is simple: what mankind is offered is either to follow clear guidance or to go astray. God tells the truth, and He says: "What lies beyond the truth except error?"